

Ordinary Germans or Willing Killers: Klemperer and the Goldhagen Debate

A Senior Honors Thesis

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*To my parents and my grandparents.*

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## Introduction

While historians have studied the Holocaust for decades, examining both the perpetrator and the victim, it seems that one group of Germans has been overlooked: the ordinary, civilian Germans. These individuals, though not actively killing Jews or deporting them to death camps, did facilitate the Holocaust. Whether by their non-action and silence, or by their persecution of the Jews, these Germans contributed to the death of six million Jews during the Nazi period. Even though so much has been written about this period of history, it was not until 1995 that a wealth of information about everyday life in Nazi Germany came to be published. These accounts were the diaries of Victor Klemperer, a German Jew who lived in Dresden from 1933-1945. These diaries have been hailed as the quintessential source for studying myriad aspects of both the Holocaust and the Nazi era. H.A. Turner, the late Yale University historian, had this to say about Klemperer's records: "By far the most important German diary of the century for social history, it will long remain an indispensable source of information for anyone seriously interested in understanding modern Germany. It is especially valuable for the light it throws on how Germans behaved at the time of the Holocaust and what they knew then about the fate of its victims."<sup>1</sup> It is for this reason that I chose to conduct a detailed study of Klemperer's diaries; I intended to determine the motives of the ordinary, civilian Germans with whom Klemperer came into daily contact.

Though Klemperer's diaries were the first great source that revealed the motivations of ordinary, civilian Germans, other studies concerning a different kind of ordinary German had been conducted only years prior to the diaries' release. Since German reunification in 1990, a host of explanations for Germans' participation in the Holocaust has been debated, but none have

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<sup>1</sup> Turner, Henry Ashby. "Victor Klemperer's Holocaust." *German Studies Review* 22 (Oct., 1999): 385-95. *JSTOR*. The Ohio State University, Columbus, OH. 11 May 2009 <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/1432266>>.

been as controversial as those debated between Christopher Browning and Daniel J. Goldhagen. In their respective works, both men investigate Reserve Police Battalion 101, a group of Germans who killed thousands of Jews in Poland during the Nazi period. These men were among the first to study the perpetrators of the Holocaust in great detail, and both Browning and Goldhagen find that these men were to some extent “ordinary” in that they were atypical of what one might describe as Nazified. Despite this lack of affiliation with the Nazi party and lack of belief in Nazi ideology, both Browning and Goldhagen find that these ordinary Germans were willing to kill their victims. This is where the similarities end, however.

Even after examining the same source material, both men come to strikingly different conclusions about why these ordinary men became willing killers. In *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (1992), Browning argues that a multi-causal explanation is most plausible in explaining the Germans’ motivations, and that peer pressure, antisemitism, propaganda and dehumanization of the victim all contributed to the perpetrators’ behavior. In contrast, Goldhagen maintains in *Hitler’s Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (1996) that only one factor, eliminationist antisemitism, could explain the men’s actions. He argues that this virulent form of antisemitism was present in Germany decades before the Nazi period, and moreover, that it could be applied to any German, whether military or civilian. These explanations of ordinary Germans’ motivations for the Holocaust sparked what came to be known as the Goldhagen Debate; for years after Goldhagen’s publication of his work in 1996, dozens of historians argued for or against both men’s explanations. Much of the criticism fell on Goldhagen, for a host of reasons ranging from his methodology to his sensationalizing of the atrocities. While I agree with many of Goldhagen’s

critics, and do find much of Browning's argument to be plausible, I have also found that one aspect of Goldhagen's argument seems to have been overlooked.

Goldhagen states that this eliminationist antisemitism could be applied to all Germans in Germany, whether they were affiliated with a paramilitary group or whether they were civilians. While most critics, including Browning, have discounted this claim, none have presented sound evidence to explain other motivating factors that caused civilian Germans to facilitate the Holocaust. For this reason, I have studied the diaries of Victor Klemperer in order to determine if Browning's or Goldhagen's argument can be applied to those ordinary, civilian Germans. Klemperer was a German Jew who lived in Dresden throughout the Nazi period. Because his wife was not Jewish, he was not sent to a concentration camp and was able to survive the Holocaust. During the twelve years of Nazi rule, Klemperer kept detailed diaries, describing the seemingly mundane events of his everyday life. These events, however, along with Klemperer's astute analysis, came to depict what motivated the ordinary, civilian Germans to facilitate the Holocaust.

Indeed, by examining Klemperer's diaries, I have been able to develop an argument that reveals the complex motives of these previously overlooked ordinary Germans. In this study, I first explain the vast amount of evidence present in Klemperer's diaries, evidence that helps explain the motivations of ordinary Germans. I then examine both Browning's and Goldhagen's argument and each man's background in order to determine how they come to starkly different conclusions. After establishing this background information, I then relate Klemperer's diaries to both arguments in order to determine which holds more credence. From my analysis of Klemperer's diaries in relation to Browning's multi-causal explanation and Goldhagen's monocausal argument, I argue that Klemperer's diaries reveal that ordinary Germans'

motivations were multifaceted and that these factors reveal a decisively human condition, not a particularly German phenomenon.

## Chapter One: The Ordinary Germans in Klemperer's Diaries

There are those who would question the value that Victor Klemperer's diaries<sup>2</sup> have for understanding the Holocaust and the reasoning behind the perpetrators' actions. Indeed, some even believe that knowledge of the *Alltagsgeschichte*<sup>3</sup> "will turn attention away from the most significant features of the National Socialist regime, in particular the genocidal mass murder of European Jewry."<sup>4</sup> After reading Klemperer's diaries, I do not believe that this is the case. In fact, it seems to me to be the opposite – Klemperer's accounts of everyday life in Dresden highlight the reasons why these ordinary Germans contributed to the murder of six million Jews. Moreover, Klemperer brings to light the actions, and non-actions, of those whom Christopher Browning terms as "ordinary Germans": the German men and women who were not typically Nazified.<sup>5</sup> The diaries provide a look into the lives of these individuals who, though they were not in line with the Party, still supported the deplorable actions of the fascist regime. Through these entries, one is able to deduce how seemingly insignificant acts – an antisemitic remark here, the neglect of a Jewish friend there – all contributed to an environment that made the Holocaust a reality.

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<sup>2</sup> Victor Klemperer, *I Will Bear Witness: 1933-1945, A Diary of the Nazi Years*, Random House, Inc.: New York, 1998.

Victor Klemperer kept several detailed diaries throughout his life, but for this study I will be referencing only the diaries from 1933-1945. Further references to the diaries in this paper will be noted in parenthetical citation by date.

<sup>3</sup> The *Alltagsgeschichte* can be defined as the "history of everyday life." It takes into account the daily events of ordinary citizens in order to better understand an era as a whole.

<sup>4</sup> Christopher R. Browning, "German Memory, Judicial Interrogation, Historical Reconstruction." Ed. Saul Friedlander, *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the "Final Solution"* Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1992. 35.

Browning is referring to others who believe that the *Alltagsgeschichte* is not beneficial. Browning himself supports studying such accounts.

<sup>5</sup> Christopher Browning describes the ordinary men of Police Battalion 101 as "educated" men who "spent their formative years in the pre-1933 period. Many came from a social milieu that was relatively unreceptive to National Socialism. They knew perfectly well the moral norms of German society before the Nazis. They had earlier standards by which to judge the Nazi policies they were asked to carry out." (Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland*, New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1992, 182.)



Moreover, while it may be difficult to study the actions or non-actions of millions of Germans during this period of persecution, Victor Klemperer's diaries provide astute insight into the minds and motives of the German people. To be sure, Klemperer is a credible source of information. A professor of romance languages, Klemperer wrote analytically and with little bias. One might think that as a Jew, he would be inclined to indict any German with whom he came in contact. Instead, he struggles throughout the diaries with what motivated the ordinary Germans, and struggles with whether or not he can still consider them his countrymen. What is more, Klemperer's diaries are not memoirs; all that Klemperer documents occurred in his present time, thus eliminating the distortion of facts that can occur over time in one's memory. Thus, Klemperer is a reliable source of information about the ordinary Germans' behavior and motivations. As he stated on May 27, 1942, he chose to craft a testament to the guilt of Nazis and ordinary Germans alike: "But I shall go on writing. That is *my* heroism. I will bear witness, precise witness!"

These particular diaries reveal how ordinary Germans played into the Nazis' hands. Sentiments lying deep among the populace and the Germans' desire to conform allowed the Nazis to create an environment that was primed for the execution of the Holocaust. To be sure, a striking element of these diaries is the palpable fear generated from the Nazis' propaganda ploys; whether through posters, newspapers and magazines like *Der Stürmer* or through films such as *Jud Süß* (1940), propaganda created an avenue through which the Nazis were able to significantly influence Germans. This influence was so great that it contributed to the murderous actions of police battalions in Eastern Europe and other less dramatic acts of antisemitism. These elements created an "us/them" mentality among the populace, developed an aura of credibility for Nazi actions and most importantly, fostered the deep-rooted antisemitism

throughout the German population. Though it is difficult to directly identify the cause of such actions as the police battalion killings in eastern Germany and in Poland, Klemperer's diaries depict a milieu in which these killings were possible.

Moreover, Klemperer's diaries give a more substantive answer to the question of how ordinary Germans facilitated the Holocaust; he makes clear that antisemitism was not the only factor, but also Nazi propaganda and elements of group think. In any totalitarian state, fear is a prime element of control and influence over the populace, and it would be unreasonable to think that this was not also the case in the Nazi period. Indeed, Klemperer acknowledges time and again that Germans who were not party members or not even antisemitic were moved to act against Jews based on fear of what would happen if they did not conform. Furthermore, the Nazis' propaganda was so effective, that even Klemperer, a Jew, admits to being influenced by it.<sup>6</sup> Thus, Victor Klemperer's diaries highlight the history of antisemitism, Nazi antisemitic propaganda, fear, group think, and isolation of the Jews that explain why the ordinary Germans facilitated the Holocaust.

### **Acts of Sympathy and Generosity toward the Jews**

First, one must acknowledge that Klemperer gives ample evidence of acts of kindness and compassion throughout the Nazi period. These generous acts by Germans in the Nazi period are essential to comprehending the Germans' varied motivations in their responses to Jewish persecution. While antisemitism was present in Germany, Klemperer also recorded several instances of Aryan acts of sympathy toward the Jews. Throughout his diaries, Klemperer discusses instances of Aryans giving aid to him and his wife, speaking out against the regime and

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<sup>6</sup>After the election on November 14, 1933, Hitler won with 93% of the vote. The same day Klemperer writes in regard to the media's legitimization of the election: "Now all of it makes me drunk, I too am beginning to believe in the power and permanency of Hitler."

even offering to hide him should the situation arise. On March 17, 1940, Klemperer writes about such help from the Germans:

“For my part I encounter much sympathy, people help me out, but fearfully of course.

Yesterday I met Moses, the greengrocer... ‘If you’re not ashamed to carry a sack?’ I was not ashamed and was given an unfrozen cabbage, a rutabaga and carrots –all rare delicacies.

Moses has repeatedly given Eva potatoes. It is well known that we are allocated fewer coupons than ‘comrades of the people.’”

The Nazis in Dresden most certainly could have punished Moses severely for this action; as Klemperer also records, Aryans were almost always treated more harshly than the Jews they helped, at least to his knowledge (Dec. 3, 1938). Even though Moses knew that there was a great chance that he could be put in prison or sent to a concentration camp, he chose to help the Klemperers, demonstrating that antisemitism was not as widespread in Germany as one might have thought. Similarly, after discussing another act of Aryan compassion, Klemperer states that, “It is an expression of courage and a profession of opposition. It is a most significant symptom of the general mood.” (December 24, 1939). In this case, Klemperer goes so far as to proclaim that Aryans in general feel for the Jews and are opposed to their persecution.

This urge to help the Jews would explain the almost suicidal desire of an acquaintance, Richter, to help hide Klemperer. By the time that Richter tells Klemperer that he wants to help save him from certain death, nearly all in Germany, Aryan or Jew, were aware of the dangers that one could face if found guilty of protecting a Jew (November 26, 1944). Despite this, in 1943 Klemperer documents how Richter implores him to accept any assistance: “I absolutely had to ‘remove’ myself; I could come to his office, he would find an empty room for me somewhere” (February 14, 1943). Richter was not the only case of such compassion that Klemperer recorded; a few months later, he writes, “The man in Wehlen will perhaps even hide

me, if I should be summoned to the Gestapo” (May 22, 1943). These cases are the ultimate expression of opposition against the regime and compassion for the plight of the Jews. One must take these occurrences into account, even the arguably less dangerous offerings of food or clothing to the impoverished Jews. They give substance to the idea that not all Germans were virulent Jew-haters and that a good portion of Germans did feel disgust at what was happening to the Jews.

In light of the antisemitism that was present in Germany, these instances of kindness and compassion are evidence that one cannot explain away the Holocaust by these feelings of hate alone. Though they do not rule out antisemitism as a factor altogether, they emphasize that other forces were involved in shaping the thoughts and actions of the Aryan population. The Germans were not brainwashed, did not blindly follow the Nazis. Neither were they all devout, Jew-hating Nazis. What they were was human; they were a complex group of individuals, with feelings and beliefs that were drastically different from person to person. Indeed, because of these dramatic differences among those who were antisemites, those who offered protection to the Jews at risk to themselves and all of those in between prove that other elements were at work in causing ordinary Germans to facilitate the Holocaust.

### **History of Antisemitism Before and During the Nazi Period**

Though the Nazis did exploit and foster antisemitism in Germany, they did not create it. Klemperer shows that these feelings against the Jewish population were present before the Nazi period and only grew stronger under the Nazi regime. On January 10, 1937, Klemperer reflects on an incident that occurred in 1923. At a time when nationalism was quite strong in Germany because of French and Belgian occupation of the Ruhr, Klemperer was scheduled to give a speech on the anniversary of Germany’s unification in 1871. The university administrators,

however, did not think it prudent for a Jew to speak with such nationalistic fervor among the populace, and they did not allow him to proceed. Klemperer writes:

“(…) I was prevented from holding the speech on January 18. Afterward Ulich, the department head, came to my lecture to console me – but the republican government did nothing about the fact that I had been prevented from speaking. That is how weak it was, and National Socialism already so powerful and popular. Except at that time I did not yet see it like that (… ) Depressing: Hitler really was in line with the will of the German people.”

That no one attempted to right this injustice and instead accepted it is a testament to the antisemitism that was present throughout Germany long before Hitler came to power. Indeed, Klemperer realizes that antisemitism was rife in Germany, and that he was wrong to believe otherwise. This is essential, in that ordinary Germans who helped facilitate the Holocaust, whether through apathy or by actively participating in the slaughter of the Jews, did not need to be Nazis to do so – they only had to believe that what they were doing was right. By growing up in a society that accepted and esteemed such beliefs for years prior to the Nazi period, the likelihood that the Germans would support those who carried out the Holocaust, or would be indifferent to the plight of their Jewish neighbors, is significant. If, as antisemites, they believed that the Jews were inferior beings, why would they object to Jewish persecution? What is more, it would have been that much simpler for already indoctrinated Germans to not only ignore what was happening to the Jews, but to agree wholeheartedly with the atrocities committed against the Jewish population. Hence, Klemperer does reveal that a widespread antisemitism existed in Germany before the Nazis came to power and likely led to the persecution of the Jews from 1933 until the end of the Nazi period.

In an entry from only a week later, Klemperer discusses how a photograph in *Der Stürmer* helps him to remember another account of antisemitism that occurred prior to January

1933. The photograph shows two girls swimming at a resort near a sign that states “Prohibited for Jews.” The photograph bears the caption, “How nice that it’s just us now!” This prompts Klemperer to remember a much earlier event. While still in school in 1901, Klemperer and his other Jewish classmates did not attend class on Yom Kippur, and classmates later told him how a teacher had reacted: “The next day our comrades told us, laughing and without the least malice (just as the words themselves were also only uttered jokingly by the altogether humane teacher), Kufahl, the mathematician, had said to the reduced class, ‘Today, it’s just us.’ In my memory, these words took on a horrible significance: to me it confirms the claim of the NSDAP to express the true opinion of the German people” (August 17, 1937). It is obvious in this record that the Germans, even decades before the Nazis took power, believed that the Jews were different and separate from Germans and should be treated as such. Even this seemingly innocent comment has great significance, as it reveals how Germans, who may not have been openly antisemitic, actually felt about the Jews. In Klemperer’s view, this incident revealed the opinion of a majority of Germans, and is exactly why the Nazis felt confident in their exploitation of this hatred. Thus, this account is an example of the history of antisemitism in Germany.

Further, Klemperer makes note of many acts of antisemitism that occurred within the first year of official Nazi rule. It is not likely that the National Socialist antisemitic propaganda would have already so influenced Germans that they would have acted out against the Jews in these first months of the new regime; rather, it is likely that these entries are representative of a history of antisemitism in Germany. Indeed, Klemperer documents actions of antisemitism that occurred only six months after Hitler was named chancellor. On June 17, 1933, he states that he is afraid to refrain from making a complaint against a Jew named Sandel, a man who has swindled him out of a business deal. He owes money to his lender, Prätorius, yet he writes, “for

me to report a Jew, now! But I shall have to do it nevertheless, otherwise Prätorius and Gestein will think I'm frightened – and they are right to think so" (June 17, 1933). Here it is obvious that Klemperer is afraid to take legal action as a Jew, and also is afraid to turn over a Jew to the authorities – both men would likely suffer persecution. Moreover, antisemitism was not a newly formed mindset among the Germans; for Prätorius to believe not only that Klemperer would be wrong to protect a Jew, but also to think of the man as Jewish, as separate from Germans, indicates that these beliefs are more deeply rooted. It is not likely that these strong feelings could have been fashioned within the six months that Hitler was in power. Further, this quote illustrates how changes in the legal system made after the Nazis came to power promoted disenfranchisement of the Jews, and I will analyze these changes later in this chapter.

In addition, the Germans' knowledge of the nature of concentration camps late in the Nazi period is evidence of their indifference to the Jews. On October 17, 1942, Klemperer writes, "Today for the first time news from a concentration camp of the death of two women. Until now only men died there... Both were transported from the women's camp in Mecklenburg to Auschwitz, which appears to be a swift-working slaughterhouse." Two months later, on December 3, 1942, Klemperer gives details of life inside the camps: "According to several reports the worst thing about the camp business so far is said to be the delousing of the women. While they ran around naked in one place from one station of the cross to the next, they were photographed by the Gestapo; in cold rainy weather they had to stand in the yard for a long time with wet hair (...)." Likewise, on February 17, 1943, Klemperer gives more details of the Jews' journey to camps: "Besides, many people have long been saying, that many of the evacuees don't even arrive in Poland alive. They were being gassed in cattle trucks during the journey, and then stopped on the line by an already-dug mass grave." Klemperer even hears of the mass

shootings in Poland, stating on September 15, 1944, “Waldmann reported yesterday, a foreign station broadcasted this: When the Russians entered Larusha (the Warsaw front), they found the S.S. engaged in shooting 1,000 Jews (men, women and children).” If Klemperer, a Jew essentially isolated from most of society, knew about the death camps, even details about what occurred inside them, then most of the populace had to as well. These accounts verify that the ordinary Germans knew about the atrocities, but they chose to do nothing about it; they chose to be silent, chose to allow the persecution to unfold.

In this way, Klemperer gives essential insight into how ordinary Germans felt toward the Jews even without the influence of the Nazis. A history of antisemitism throughout Germany simply cannot be overlooked in regard to how it affected Germans’ attitude toward the persecution of the Jews. This antisemitism created an environment within Germany that would support the atrocities and make the slaughter of the Jews possible. Klemperer, by enumerating the beliefs of the Germans and remarking on the knowledge in the general population of the presence of concentration camps so early in the Nazi period, does demonstrate how antisemitism affected the ordinary Germans. Yet though antisemitism was of course necessary for the Holocaust to occur, it was not the sole factor that caused the Germans to facilitate the Holocaust.

### **Propaganda as a Tool of Hatred**

With this history of antisemitism in Germany, the Nazis were in a prime position to exploit these feelings to the advantage of the regime’s genocidal policies. Of course, Klemperer documents this, recording many instances of the Nazis’ constant and effective barrage of antisemitic propaganda. These images of the Jews were essential to the regime’s success for so many years, as Klemperer himself acknowledges: “Yes, I judge as a Jew, because as such I am particularly affected by the Jewish business in Hitlerism, and because it is central to the whole



structure, to the whole character of National Socialism and is uncharacteristic of everything else” (April 16, 1941). Here, Klemperer goes as far as to state that antisemitism, while not characteristic of society as a whole, is the cornerstone of National Socialism. It might not have been the foundation of German society, but it was pervasive enough that the Nazis were able to exploit it to allow for the annihilation of the Jews.

Without a doubt, propaganda in the Nazi period was a major factor in causing ordinary Germans to facilitate the progress of the Holocaust. It was relentless and always present, a constant reminder to the Germans that Jews were an inferior, sub-human class. Moreover, this propaganda was intended to isolate the Jews and it was most definitely effective in doing so, even influencing Klemperer and his wife. After discussing the different types of propaganda that he has witnessed, Klemperer states that even he “almost believe(s)” (November 14, 1933). His wife, Eva, makes an even bolder statement about the effectiveness of the propaganda; according to Klemperer, “Eva’s bitterness is greater than mine. National Socialism, she says, more precisely the attitude of the Jews toward it is making her anti-Semitic” (October 9, 1933). Eva is disgusted not only by the Germans’ acceptance of the propaganda, but also by how the Jews accept the persecution. Her frustration and despair testify to the degree to which propaganda was effective in Germany: If the Klemperers, both opposed to National Socialism and antisemitism, could feel the effects of the propaganda, to what extent could it have touched those who were indifferent, mildly antisemitic or even virulently so? Indeed, these comments show how pervasive the Nazi message of hate was throughout Germany and how significantly it influenced the populace.

Antisemitic propaganda occurred in several different forms and targeted many different groups, but some of the most striking references to the propaganda come in regard to German

children. Since children are so susceptible to authority, it is no wonder that the Nazis targeted them in their propaganda campaigns. Klemperer makes note of one instance of this as early as March 30, 1933: “Terrible! – In a toy shop, a children’s ball with the swastika.” Even children’s toys were made objects of Nazi propaganda, slowly and consistently drumming the Nazi message of hate into the children. Yet this, a ball with the swastika emblazoned upon it, was a mild case of Nazi influence in children’s lives. Some of the more blatant and malicious types of propaganda that were aimed at children came in the form of children’s books created by Julius Streicher’s *Stürmer* Publishing House. One such book, released in 1936, was entitled *Trust no Fox on His Green Heath and No Jew on His Oath*. Written in rhyme and accompanied by colorful pictures, the book is chillingly similar to any normal children’s book. The content, however, is disturbingly antisemitic. On the first page alone, Jews are equated with Satan, with the rhyme stating, “The Devil brought them to our land / Like thieves they stole into our land / Hoping to get an upper hand;” a large picture of Satan spans the page. The book also warns the children to watch for Jews hiding behind Aryanized Jewish names and also of the “Eternal Jew” (see image below).<sup>7</sup>

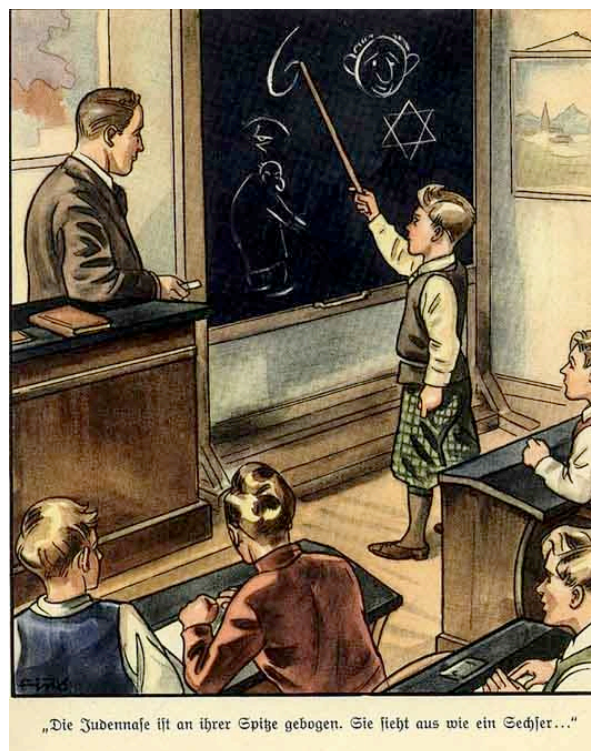


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<sup>7</sup> All images in this chapter have been taken from the following online database:  
<http://www.calvin.edu/academic/cas/gpa/ww2era.htm>

This image makes obvious the effect that Nazi propaganda could have on impressionable children in Germany. The grotesque figure, a monster, would frighten any child, making him fearful of an entire Jewish population. In effect, the Jews would become like any other mythical monster from children's storybooks, and would take on the same terrible images in the minds of German youth.

Yet the Nazis did not stop there. Schoolbooks drummed the image of the evil Jew into children's minds. *Der Giftpilz* (1936) was another blatantly antisemitic children's book that Germans used in schools to teach children about the evils of world Jewry. Throughout the book, children are told of ways to tell who is a Jew based on appearance alone and are warned of their deceptive, malicious intentions. Below is a picture from *Der Giftpilz*. The caption reads, "The Jewish nose is bent. It looks like the number six."



Thus, the excerpt from *Der Giftpilz* is an example of how extensive the indoctrination of children was in the Third Reich. Children were taught to identify Jews, to fear them and to even act out against them. As evidence of the effectiveness, one can again turn to Klemperer. After passing a school on January 17, 1943, he writes that, “The older boys walk past me and are well behaved, the little ones, on the other hand, laugh, shout ‘Jew,’ and so on at me. So it has been drummed into the little ones.” Thus, Nazi propaganda formed German children into antisemites, making them instruments of Nazi hate. Yet the propaganda, while extremely effective on the youth in Germany, did not leave the same impression on older Germans. Though the little boys felt compelled to taunt Klemperer because he was a Jew, the older boys had come to view this type of action as unacceptable, and did not join in the taunting. Since the propaganda was not as effective on older Germans, I believe that other factors were integral in contributing to the Germans’ acceptance of the persecution of the Jew, and I will address them later in this chapter.

Still, Klemperer felt the effects of this indoctrination in Dresden, referring to the actions of German youth many times throughout his diaries. Upon seeing Klemperer with the yellow Star of David on his breast pocket, a child yells out, “Ugh, a Jew!” Klemperer remarks that the mother “apologized, he had not heard it at home – presumably at kindergarten” (October 4, 1941). Thus, National Socialist antisemitic propaganda particularly influenced the children in Germany. Soon after this incident, Klemperer reports of a more disturbing encounter with some Aryan children: “At Chemitzer Platz, a section of Hitler Youth cubs, ‘A yid, a yid!’ ...I look calmly at their commander, not a word is spoken. Once I am past, behind me, but not called out loudly, one, two voices: ‘A yid!’” (November 1, 1941). This instance demonstrates just how far-reaching the antisemitism was in Germany. The children knew to identify Klemperer as a Jew, knew that it was encouraged to shout at him, to degrade him. What is more, Klemperer makes

no mention of any reaction of others on the street around him, largely because there was none; this is indicative of the other factors that contributed to the Germans' behavior, which I will address further in this chapter. Hence, the Nazi propaganda was extremely effective in how it shaped the minds and beliefs of the German youth, and essentially shaped them into messengers of antisemitism.

Of course, Nazi propaganda was not only targeted at German youth. The influence did not only indoctrinate children, it also helped foster the antisemitism present in older demographics in Germany. Time and again, Klemperer makes note of those who were influenced by propaganda in *Der Stürmer*, "The Eternal Jew" touring exhibition (see image below) and films such as *Jud Süß*. Especially important is that Klemperer emphasizes that not only party members or vehement antisemites were influenced by the propaganda. Remarking about his friends, the Hirche family, he states, "They are not well-disposed to the Nazis, but even they repeat the nonsense that is hammered into everyone" (May 27, 1936). Thus, propaganda was effective in shaping the minds of those who were not even sympathetic to the Nazi cause, and over time, as Klemperer records, even turned those same individuals into facilitators of the Holocaust.

Visual propaganda was especially effective in fostering antisemitism in Germany. The Nazis made this propaganda pervasive and relentless, taking care to influence as many Germans as possible. In this way, the Germans came to be active believers in the evil of Jewry or, at the very least, came to be deadened by the barrage, indifferent to the plight of the Jews. Klemperer makes note of this constant propaganda in 1939: "At every corner, in a hundred shop windows the repulsive poster for the political touring exhibition: 'The Eternal Jew.' In the newspaper

daily references to the need to visit this exhibition: the most odious race, the most odious bastard mixture” (April 7, 1939).



This account demonstrates how the Nazi message exploited the latent antisemitism among the populace and aimed to isolate the Jews; the Jews were a separate race, one that was distinctly different from and inferior to the German race. What is more, this exhibition was particularly successful and well liked among the populace. In the few short months the exhibition ran, from November 1937 to January 1938, over 5,000 people per day ventured out to see “The Eternal Jew.” Most importantly, “the Secret Police reports claimed that it “helped to promote a sharp rise in anti-Semitic feelings, and in some cases violence against the Jewish community.”<sup>8</sup> Thus, ordinary Germans did respond positively to blatant antisemitic propaganda.

Other types of visual propaganda were just as successful. As early as 1935, Klemperer describes a trip to the cinema: “*The Cossack and the Nightingale*; such awful trashy rubbish that it is not worth making any note of it. But in it the role of a gunrunning Levantine monster. Immediately the girl beside me whispers: ‘The Jew!’” (August 11, 1935). This quote makes it painfully evident that the Nazis were successful in securing the image of an evil, deplorable Jew

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<sup>8</sup> Welch, David. "Nazi Propaganda." BBC. BBC. 31 Jan. 2009  
<[http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/worldwars/wwtwo/nazi\\_propaganda\\_gallery\\_05.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/worldwars/wwtwo/nazi_propaganda_gallery_05.shtml)>.

in the minds of the Germans. The girl here cannot help but be fearful of and disgusted by the Jew in the film, just as many others like her surely were. Furthermore, in the same entry, Klemperer discusses his fear of the growing hatred toward the Jews among the populace. He states, “The Jew-baiting has become so extreme, far worse than during the boycott, there are the beginnings of a pogrom here and there, and we expect to be beaten to death at any moment” (August 11, 1935). It is clear that the propaganda did affect the ordinary Germans: Klemperer and his wife actually feared for their lives, believing that at any moment they could be attacked. Soon, after this account, the persecution of the Jews came ever more vehement, in part because of new advancements in propaganda.

With the start of the war, the propaganda became even more forceful, particularly in film. One such film, *Jud Süß* (1940), was one of the most successful and accepted antisemitic films of the Nazi period. The film follows a Jew by the name of Joseph Süß Oppenheimer, who deceives the Duke of Württemberg and brings misfortune to him and his people. Throughout the film, the antisemitism is conspicuous: Jews are portrayed as hook-nosed, shadowy creatures; Jew Süß corrupts the Duke and rapes an innocent, blond German woman; the townspeople finally bring Jew Süß to justice with the death sentence at the end of the film. Below is the inside cover of a program for the film and one can see how Süß was portrayed as an evil, menacing Jew, while the Aryan woman was portrayed as an innocent victim of Jewry.



The film's success was evident throughout Germany, as "teenagers who saw the film beat up Jews after seeing it."<sup>9</sup> What is more, the Nazis intended for the film to prepare Germans for the extermination of the Jews. Indeed, the movie "was always shown to the 'Aryan' people, especially in the East, when 'resettlements for the death camps were imminent...in order to incense the 'Aryan' population against the Jews...and thus to choke off in the bud any possible help to them on the part of the people.'"<sup>10</sup>

Despite its nastiness, the German people did not denounce the film – they embraced it. As Goebbels states in his diary on September 25, 1940: "The premiere of *Jud Süß*. A very large audience with almost the entire Reich Cabinet. The film is an incredible success. One hears only enthusiastic responses. The whole room raves."<sup>11</sup> A second film, *The Eternal Jew* (1940), was not so successful; Klemperer, discussing both films, states, "Film propaganda *Jud Süß* and *The Eternal Jew*. The second film, evidently very nasty and launched with the greatest ballyhoo, has incidentally disappeared here again after less than a week. Why? Weariness and disgust of the public?" (December 10, 1940). *The Eternal Jew*, released under the guise of a documentary, was less effective among the German population for its directness. A scene from the movie shows rats running through the street, and it compares the Jews to the filthy vermin, a considerably deplorable comparison. The Germans could not identify with anyone in the film, as it was too virulent in its antisemitism, and thus they turned away from it.

Though *The Eternal Jew* was met with repugnance because it went a step too far in its attack on the Jews, *Jud Süß* touched on the feelings of ordinary Germans. It reflected their fears

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<sup>9</sup> David S. Hull, *Film in the Third Reich*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1973, 169.

<sup>10</sup> David S. Hull, *Film in the Third Reich*, 170.

<sup>11</sup> Eric Rentschler, "The Elective Other: Jew Süß (1940)," *The Ministry of Illusion: Nazi Cinema and Its Afterlife*, Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1996, 159.



of a menacing, conniving Jew, one that could silently enter society and wreak havoc among the populace. Moreover, its fictional style allowed the Germans to identify with the “good guys,” the Aryans, and turn against the “bad guy” – Jew Süß. This characterization of the Jews and the Aryans made for a more rational acceptance of the film. Surely no German would want to support the villain of the film, and certainly would not support him, the Jew, within society. In this way, *Jud Süß* “turned the unconscious outward;”<sup>12</sup> Nazi propaganda effectively fostered a sense of antisemitism throughout the population, increasing the feeling among Germans toward their Jewish neighbors.

Moreover, the amount of antisemitic acts that Klemperer documents increase from 1940 onward, after the success of such visual propaganda as “The Eternal Jew” exhibition and *Jud Süß*. In 1940, Klemperer writes of such antisemitism: “A woman comes to see her wounded husband in the military hospital here...She starts screaming and doesn’t stop: ‘It’s the Jews’ fault! It’s the Jews fault!’” (June 11, 1940). Here it is clear that the woman sincerely believes that the Jews have every intention of ruining Germany and its people, and are directly responsible for her husband’s injury. Just like the Germans in *Jud Süß*, the woman sees the Jews as the reason for any misfortune that may befall her. In addition, Klemperer makes note of many other instances of Aryans jeering at him or mistreating him. For example, when trying to purchase potatoes at a store, a woman steps in front of Klemperer and declares, “I was here first – the Jew has to wait.” (May 19, 1942). Comments such as these, though resulting in no direct physical harm to the Jews, still made for an environment that allowed the Holocaust to claim millions of Jewish lives. Whether consciously or unconsciously, the Germans became facilitators of the slaughter of their Jewish neighbors, coworkers and even former friends.

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<sup>12</sup> Eric Rentschler, “The Elective Other: Jew Süß (1940),” *The Ministry of Illusion: Nazi Cinema and Its Afterlife*, 154.

## Legal and Social Isolation of the Jews

### *Legal Isolation:*

To be sure, the Nazis did more than create antisemitic films and children's books to isolate the Jews. They made sure to legitimize their actions by creating laws that further ostracized and even dehumanized the Jews. A partial cataloguing of such laws to which Klemperer refers are as follows:

"This morning at the library I was told gently, that as a non-Aryan, I was no longer allowed to use the reading room" (October 9, 1936); "Our telephone was removed on December 1... Completely impoverished and completely isolated" (December 8, 1936); "Only a few minutes ago I read the law on Jewish forenames" (August 24, 1938); "...now that I am allowed to go shopping only between three and four" (August 30 1940.); "...a letter from the Dölzschén parish, the car must be sold within the week" (February 20, 1941); "In the morning the milkmaid refused to come up. She is no longer allowed to deliver to Jews' houses" (March 1, 1941); "A new calamity: Ban on smoking for Jews" (August 10, 1941); "The 'Jewish' star...to be worn from tomorrow" (September 18, 1941); "...letter from the Jewish Community, typewriters had to be handed over on Monday and Thursday" (October 27, 1941); "Today came the ban on using the tram 'out of consideration of the repeated undisciplined behavior of Jews on the trams'" (March 6, 1942); "Now a *ban on Jews buying flowers has come out*. Not a day without a new decree against Jews" (March 16, 1942); "Latest imposition on the Jews: Ban on subscribing to or buying newspapers; also...the Aryan wife is not allowed to take or buy a newspaper in her name" (July 19, 1942); "...the egg ration card has been taken from the Jews (and likewise the vegetable card!)" (July 24, 1942,).

Through these laws, the Nazis intended to reduce the Jews to prisoners in their own homes, unable to associate with the rest of society. Klemperer records dozens of these laws that marginalized the Jews, expressing how each one chipped further and further away at his hope and will to survive. On September 17, 1935, he describes the Nürnberg Laws: "Prison for marriage and extra-marital intercourse between Jews and 'Germans,' ... withdrawal of civil

rights. And with what justification and with what threats!” Again, this example shows how the Nazis aimed to not only vilify the Jews, but to make them a separate species. Klemperer also describes how he and Eva were under virtual house arrest; curfews and other restrictions made it nearly impossible for Klemperer to leave his home. On December 20, 1940, he writes, “New intensification of Jewish harassment: After eight o’clock confined in the apartment itself. Visiting other residents of the house, spending time on the entrance hall or on the stairs is prohibited.” Thus, Klemperer was literally made a prisoner in his own apartment building. It is no wonder, then, that a child may shout “Jew!” at him, or be afraid of him – the Nazis, through their laws of isolation, made each Jew something foreign and untouchable.

#### *Social Isolation:*

As a result of these edicts and Nazi propaganda, Germans became more accepting of the persecution of the Jews, and therefore contributed to the extreme social isolation of the Jews. This is essential to understanding how ordinary Germans contributed to the horrors of the Holocaust. By believing the Jews to be untouchable, the Germans essentially came to view them as separate from the population, as outcasts of society. Throughout his diaries, Klemperer talks about the severe loneliness and isolation that he and his wife Eva experience. Not only strangers ignored the Klemperers; friends and coworkers abandoned the couple and made them feel like prisoners in their homeland. In 1936, Klemperer writes, “We are completely isolated. We have heard nothing from Annemarie Köhler, nothing from Johannes Köhler for weeks...” (April 28, 1936). Here, Klemperer’s close friends, who are Aryan, chose to ignore him and Eva. Though probably not malicious in nature, this distancing was a result of the environment in which they lived – Jews were simply supposed to be isolated. A few months later, Klemperer goes as far as to reference his and Eva’s “terrible abandonment by all friends” (September 14, 1936). Again,

he and his wife felt the persistent and depressing loneliness that came as a result of the social isolation from Aryans.

By isolating the Jews, it became ever easier for the Germans to accept the persecution of them. Hardly any ordinary Germans felt compelled to help the Jews because they seemed to be part of another race, part of another world. Thus, when Klemperer writes of the knowledge of Jews being sent to Poland, to Thereisenstadt or placed into barracks in Dresden, it is not surprising that he does not report any public outcry against the injustices. The public simply agreed with these actions; if they believed the Jews to be outcasts, then it is no wonder that they believed they should also be physically barred from society.

### **Other Factors: Fear and Group Mentality**

Klemperer records several instances of Germans acting in accord with Nazi doctrine, despite their feelings of opposition toward the regime. Instead of banding together to put an end to the Nazis' exploitation of power or to put an end to the mass murder of innocent men, women and children, these Germans banded with the Nazis out of fear, selfishness and the influence of group think on the populace. As one Jewish inmate of the Buchenwald concentration camp, Frederick Grubel,<sup>13</sup> said after the war, "What cannot be undone is a neighbor turning up in a brown uniform all of a sudden and a colleague who enthusiastically joined the Deutsche Reichsfront."<sup>14</sup> The ordinary Germans turned away from the Jewish neighbors toward the Nazi cause, allowing the persecution to continue.

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<sup>13</sup> Kaufman, Michael T. "Obituary: Fred Grubel, 89, Who Headed A Jewish Research Institute." *The New York Times* 11 Oct. 1998.

Frederick Grubel was the director of the Jewish Community in Leipzig in 1936, and consequently he became an inmate of Buchenwald concentration camp for six months in 1938.

<sup>14</sup> Taken from exhibition text, Buchenwald Memorial, Weimar, Germany, visited July 2008.

One of the most striking examples of this facilitation of the Holocaust is the participation of ordinary Germans in Nazi organizations. Klemperer documents one instance on October 9, 1933, early in the Nazis' reign of terror. While discussing a friend's non-Nazi, right-wing relatives, Klemperer states, "Bitterness everywhere and throughout the stratum. Georg Mühlbach is supposed to have been ill literally for weeks, he had trained SA people with the greatest reluctance." Though bitter because of the political climate, Mühlbach still associates with the SA. Like him, others followed along with the system, still believing in the separation of the armed forces from the government, trusting that the army could save them from Hitler should the need arise. Yet less than a year later, Klemperer documents Hitler's rise to power:

"The offices of President and Chancellor are united in Hitler's person, the army (Wehrmacht) will give its oath to him, and at half past six the troops in Dresden swore their oath and everything is completely calm. Our butcher says indifferently, 'Why vote first? It just costs a lot of money.' The people hardly notice this complete coup d'état, it all takes place in silence...Eva says, 'And we belong to this band of slaves.'... We had always placed hopes in the Reichswehr...and now it calmly gives its oath to the new 'Commander-in-Chief of the Wehrmacht.'" (August 4, 1934, Klemperer, 80)

As did Klemperer and Eva, the Germans kept their faith in the army. Still, even after the Wehrmacht's allegiance to Hitler, individuals like the butcher accepted this succession of power. It was thus clear to the Klemperers that Germany would continue to accept whatever lawlessness the Nazis created, even the illegal and deplorable persecution of the Jews. Later in the same year, Klemperer overhears a conversation between two Aryan women in his lecture: "'My brother is in the S.S...' – 'And why the SS? – 'He has to be part of something, every Tom, Dick and Harry is in the HJ...' – 'Is his heart in it?' – 'Not a bit of it...but he has to.'" (December 30,

1934). Again, another ordinary German who does not feel inclined toward the Nazi cause still joins the SS.

Certainly, fear was a factor in why the Germans allowed the Holocaust to unfold in their midst. The anxiety of living in a totalitarian state caused many to go along with Nazi doctrine. This fear led to a collective belief that one had to act in accord with everyone else, and group think contributed to much of why the Germans facilitated the Holocaust rather than acted out against it. Indeed, Klemperer testifies to this fear in an entry on February 20, 1941: “Everyone is afraid of arousing the least suspicion of being friendly to Jews, the fear seems to grow all the time.” This fear was compounded by certain edicts such as one referenced by Klemperer: “‘Therefore remember your duty to the national community, so that the charge of being a stranger to the people does not, for you, turn into the accusation of causing the people mischief!’” (December 16, 1934). Still, this threat is mild. There is no direct statement that one will be punished if seen acting in opposition to the regime, there is merely the threat of being accused. In accord with this evidence, Klemperer documents a meeting with a friend on March 17, 1933. His friend, Thiemes, was an ardent supporter of the Nazi cause. In trying to make sense of his friend’s allegiance to Hitler, Klemperer states, “He is a poor swine and afraid for his post. So he runs with the pack.” Again, fear played a role in convincing an ordinary German to associate with the Nazis and follow the majority of society, even if a friend of a Jew.

Some Germans who allowed the perpetuation of the horrors against the Jews did not go so far as to join one of the Nazi organizations, but their actions still contributed to the support of the Nazis’ quest to eliminate the Jews. These ordinary Germans were not party members or even sympathetic to the Nazi cause, yet they did nothing to stop the injustices, only contributed to them. Klemperer again speaks of a discussion overheard in his classroom: “The girls are

completely anti-Nazi. But when the conversation turned to two young aristocratic women who have just been executed in Berlin for espionage, they thought there was nothing at all wrong with that. They did not ask questions about the differences between martial law and peacetime law...The sense of justice is being lost everywhere in Germany, being systematically destroyed.” (February 21, 1935). This made it obvious to Klemperer that the masses simply did not care that the Nazis trampled upon the rights of Germans and Jews alike, and instead supported the madness. Even a friend of Klemperer, by believing in the Nazis, contributed to the persecution against him: “Even today one can still be a Nazi for idealistic reasons, without being a criminal or an idiot.” Frau Kühn’s remark from October 5, 1935, however well intentioned, demonstrates the Germans’ naïveté. It is likely that one would have been aware of injustices being done to Jews everywhere, even in her home of Dresden. Klemperer and his friends knew of concentration camps at this point, and knew about those whom the Nazis sent to Thereisenstradt. Her thoughts, and those of Germans like her, allowed the Nazis to isolate, disenfranchise and murder the Jews. Thus, ordinary Germans cannot be without blame. By acquiescing to the Nazi cause and doctrine, they helped to facilitate the most horrendous atrocity of the twentieth century.

### **Conclusion**

It is clear that Klemperer’s diaries provide one with substantial evidence that helps to explain why ordinary Germans became facilitators of the Holocaust. Throughout his entries, several factors arise that explain how these Germans helped to create an environment and general public opinion that could not condemn the murder of millions of Jews. Antisemitism and Nazi propaganda did play a large role; without either of these, it is not likely that the Holocaust could have been so far reaching, or even occurred at all. Yet what one must recognize is that these

ordinary Germans knew what was happening to the Jews, and made conscious choices about how they treated the Jews. This behavior can be explained further by the fear, group pressure and isolation of the Jews, that all helped to condition the Germans. It is clear that the ordinary Germans motivations were multifaceted and that these diaries, therefore, are essential to understanding the Holocaust and those who made it possible.



## Chapter Two: Browning's Multi-Causal Explanation of the Holocaust and Supporting Evidence From Klemperer's Diaries

*"In fact, I would argue that many of the elements in this were a coming together of quite common factors and ordinary people. That, I think, is very important to recognize if we don't want to place the Holocaust apart as some kind of suprahistorical, mystical event that we cannot fathom and shouldn't even try to understand."*<sup>15</sup> – Christopher Browning

### Introduction

The evidence in Victor Klemperer's diaries demonstrates that many factors contributed to ordinary Germans' participation in and facilitation of the Holocaust. These factors can also be found in Christopher Browning's *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution* (1992), in which his argument reflects that which Klemperer reported during the Nazi period. Examining why ordinary Germans took part in the Holocaust, Browning finds that a multi-causal explanation is the most plausible in determining why the atrocities occurred. What is more, Browning's emphasis on the importance of the *Alltagsgeschichte*, everyday occurrences like those recorded in Klemperer's diaries, demonstrates the multifaceted approach that he takes in studying the ordinary perpetrators. His findings are indeed credible, in that his belief that many factors contributed to the Holocaust are supported by Klemperer's diaries. Further, his argument is rational and purposeful, and his rigorous historical training ensures this balance in his argument. Assuredly, Browning's *Ordinary Men* is the scholarly analysis necessary to accompany an everyday account like Klemperer's, so that the Holocaust might be more clearly understood.

#### *Browning's Background and Methodology:*

Christopher Browning is currently Frank Graham Professor of History at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, a post he has held since 1999. He received his master's and

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<sup>15</sup> Browning, Christopher R., "An Insidious Evil," Interview with Jennie Rothenberg, *Atlantic Unbound* 11 Feb. 2004.

doctorate from the University of Wisconsin in 1968 and 1975, respectively, investigating the atrocities during the Nazi period. With guidance from his advisor, Browning was able to produce a dissertation that was soon widely accepted by many historians, even being invited to work with Yad Vashem, the Holocaust Museum in Israel. From there, he published his most notable works, *Ordinary Men* and *The Origins of the Final Solution: The Evolution of Nazi Jewish Policy September 1939-March 1942* (2004). *Ordinary Men* eventually sparked a debate with political scientist Daniel J. Goldhagen, whose argument will be analyzed later in this study.<sup>16</sup>

Much of Browning's success and the critical acclaim he has received for his work no doubt relate to his training as a historian. H.A. Turner, the late Yale University historian, had this to say about *Ordinary Men*: "Skillfully organized, gracefully written, and judiciously argued, this compact book deserves attention of everyone concerned about the most atrocious crime of this century."<sup>17</sup> Browning certainly was careful in crafting this work, as he believes that in order to develop a credible argument, one must avoid using a deterministic methodology; he certainly did so in his study of Police Battalion 101. Indeed, Browning admits that in researching perpetrator testimonies for *Ordinary Men*, there were many accounts that were contradictory to former statements or simply historically inaccurate. Still, Browning was determined to produce an authentic analysis of the perpetrators' motivations, and thereby included as many of the testimonies as he possibly could. This allowed him to develop a "texture and differentiation to a portrayal of the German killers,"<sup>18</sup> a method that left his critics with little to cast doubt upon.

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<sup>16</sup> Browning, Christopher R, "An Insidious Evil," Interview with Jennie Rothenberg, *Atlantic Unbound* 11 Feb. 2004.

<sup>17</sup> Turner, H.A., "Review: Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland by Christopher Browning," *Journal of Modern History* 67 (Mar. 1995): 238-40, *JSTOR*, The Ohio State University, Columbus, OH, 11 May 2009 <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/2125048>>.

<sup>18</sup> Browning, Christopher R, "Ordinary Men or Ordinary Germans," Ed. Robert R. Shandley, *Unwilling Germans? The Goldhagen Debate*, Trans. Jeremiah Riemer, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998, 64.

Moreover, Browning makes sound comparative analysis, acknowledging that atrocities in Rwanda were just as brutal as the Holocaust, and that ethnic groups other than the Germans played a role in murdering the millions of Jews as well. To be sure, this sound historical methodology provided Browning with the ability to produce a work that not only stands the test of other historians, but also allows one to compare it to other historical accounts, such as Klemperer's diaries.

### **Browning's Multi-Causal Argument**

For years, much attention was directed at the victims of the Holocaust, and deservedly so. Studying the effect that such an atrocity had on those who suffered through and on those who were fortunate enough to survive was an integral part of understanding the Holocaust. It was not until decades after the Nazi period ended that a concerted effort to study the perpetrators of the atrocities began. Christopher Browning was one of the historians who chose to investigate the perpetrators, those who carried out the senseless and abhorrent acts of cruelty for nearly five years during the Nazi period. What is more, Browning chose to focus on a particular group of the perpetrators, Reserve Police Battalion 101. This group of men succeeded in killing 38,000 Jews in Poland and deporting another 45,200 to the death camp Treblinka (Browning 191-192). Even more astonishing, Browning came to find that this single group of barely 500 men was able to murder thousands of Jews without being particularly Nazified. In fact, many were atypical of what one might consider characteristic of a Nazi supporter. Because of this, Browning determined that there must have been other factors that caused these men to become brutal killers. He then developed a multi-causal explanation for the behavior of Reserve Police Battalion 101. None of the factors, he posits, are strong enough to be the sole motivating factor for the men's actions, but each taken together explain how such ordinary men could become

murderers of women, children and the elderly. Browning maintains that not only a degree of antisemitism, but also Nazi propaganda, isolation of the Jews, fear and psychological pressure all contributed to the actions of the men in Police Battalion 101. What is especially significant is that much of what Klemperer wrote is reflected in Browning's account, and this strongly supports the credibility of Browning's multi-causal argument.

*The Ordinary Men of Reserve Police Battalion 101:*

In order to understand Browning's argument, one must understand the composition of Police Battalion 101. The group was quite unlike any other paramilitary group during the Nazi period, as they were the least characteristic of those who would support the Nazi party. The men were randomly recruited in order to act as reservists within the Order Police, at a time when the most desirable men were already serving in the army or some other Nazi paramilitary group. All of them hailed from Hamburg, the least Nazified city in Germany (Browning, xvii). A majority of the men were from the working class or lower middle class, a demographic not likely to have supported the Nazi cause. In addition, the men were mostly middle-aged, with families and careers waiting for them after their service in the Police Battalion was over. Browning maintains that this factor was especially significant, as they were less likely to have been influenced by Nazi ideology leading up to their conscription and the indoctrination training they faced once becoming part of the Order Police. Indeed, had they been young men, Browning believes that their actions might have been excused, as "they would have been raised in a world in which Nazi values were the only 'moral norms' they knew" (Browning 182). Yet these men were not young and impressionable, but rather were "educated and spent their formative years in the pre-1933 period. Many came from a social milieu that was relatively unreceptive to National Socialism... They had earlier standards by which to judge the Nazi policies they were asked to

carry out” (Browning 182). To be sure, these men were not representative of the Nazi image, nor should they have acquiesced to any policy that was so extreme that it called for the murder of innocent Jews. Thus, Browning termed them “ordinary men,” and crafted a multi-causal argument for why they would commit such atrocities.

### *Ordinary Men Refrained From Killing:*

Though Browning investigated why these ordinary men committed thousands of murders, he also admits that not all of the men became killers. This evidence is essential to understanding the multifaceted motivations of the police battalion, and also explains why Browning determined that no one explanation would be sufficient for understanding the motivations of the perpetrators. Throughout *Ordinary Men*, Browning describes instances of the men refusing to kill Jews, hiding in the woods to avoid killing the Jews, volunteering to transport Jews rather than shoot them, or even misfiring their guns so as to not kill the victims. These instances are examples of the men refusing to obey orders, which one might find to be odd behavior in a totalitarian regime. Still, only 10-20% of the men actually refrained from killing the Jews, while a vast majority of the battalion contributed to the murder of thousands (Browning 159). Because not all of the men killed, some killed without wanting to and some killed with gusto, Browning determined that the men of Police Battalion 101 were “multilayered.”<sup>19</sup> From this, Browning concludes that a multi-causal explanation is necessary to explain a group of men who were so varied in their actions and in their motivations; this is not unlike the German population as a whole. Indeed, Browning states that these ordinary men “did not have to be ‘of one mind’ with

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<sup>19</sup> Browning, Christopher R, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland*, New York: HarperPerennial, 1998, 215.

This, and a few other references, have been taken from the last edition of *Ordinary Men*, in which Browning addresses Goldhagen in the afterword. These references are taken from the afterword; the rest of the volume was left unchanged.

Hitler's demonological view of the Jews to carry out genocide."<sup>20</sup> Likewise, the ordinary Germans as a whole did not have to agree with Hitler's antisemitic policy to watch silently as the persecution unfolded before them. In this way, Browning's multicausal explanation relates to the evidence found in Klemperer's diaries, and I will reference that relationship later in this chapter.

*Antisemitism in Browning's Argument:*

Without a doubt, antisemitism was a major motivating factor for those who perpetrated the acts of the Final Solution. No legitimate historian of the Nazi era would object to that fact. Yet as Browning and other historians maintain, it was not, and could not, be the lone explanation for actions of these ordinary men. Browning believes that antisemitism, though always present in Germany and in Europe, was not so prevalent that it was an ideal shared by a majority of Germans. Instead, he states that only a minority of those on the right were advocates of virulent antisemitism and of policies that would eliminate the Jews from German society. Despite the Nazis gaining power in the Reichstag and Hitler being appointed chancellor in 1933, the party still only received 37% of the vote on July 31, 1932, during the last free election. Though admitting that he has no concrete evidence that those who did not vote for the Nazis might also have been ardent antisemites, he states that "neither the election returns nor any plausible spin put on them suggest that in 1932 the vast majority of Germans were 'of one mind' with Hitler about the Jews."<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, he states that by the events of *Kristallnacht* in November 1938, most Germans supported antisemitic measures in order to "curb the violence most Germans found so distasteful." He even cites instances of the men of Police Battalion 101 attempting to

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<sup>20</sup> Browning, Christopher R, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland*, New York: HarperPerennial, 1998, 216.

<sup>21</sup> Browning, Christopher R, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland*, New York: HarperPerennial, 1998, 198.

help some Jews that they encountered. He states that “one policeman remembered procuring extra rations for the Jewish work detail he supervised in Łuków...the same man claimed to have allowed the wife of the head of the Jewish ghetto police to escape when the ghetto was being cleared” (Browning 153). Clearly, then, antisemitism was not the only factor that influenced the ordinary men.

*Conditioning of Police Battalion 101:*

Browning argues that the environments in which the ordinary men lived both prior to and during their service in the Order Police contributed to their behavior and made it easier for them to kill the Jews. These men were not exempt from the Nazis’ antisemitic campaign at home, no matter how little Nazified Hamburg was. Browning states that they, “like the rest of German society, were immersed in a deluge of racist and antisemitic propaganda” (Browning 184). Furthermore, the environment of war itself conditioned these men for the horrendous acts they would commit in Poland. Browning maintains that war was especially integral in molding their views of the victims and of Germany’s role in the world: “War, a struggle between ‘our people’ and ‘the enemy,’ creates a polarized world in which ‘the enemy’ is easily objectified and removed from the community of human obligation” (Browning 162). This “us versus them” mentality allowed the ordinary men to dehumanize the Jews and made it easier to kill them once they arrived in Poland.

Once the reservists were transported to occupied territory in Poland, Browning argues that the propaganda they had experienced at home came to life in war, as “War and negative racial stereotypes were two mutually reinforcing factors in this distancing” (Browning 162). Due to years of antisemitic and anticommunist propaganda, other groups of ordinary men killed not only Jews, but also more than two million Russian prisoners of war and thousands of

handicapped Germans before the Final Solution had even been put in place. Likewise, the ordinary men of Police Battalion 101 had become susceptible to the idea that Germans were superior to those lower races, whether or not they were conscious of it. Moreover, once in Poland, the men found Jews who were “strange and alien *Ostjuden*, not assimilated, middle-class German Jews.”<sup>22</sup> Browning believes that this made it easier for the men to carry out the mass shooting and deportations to death camps, as the victims were significantly dehumanized in their eyes. Without this conditioning, the men would not have been distanced from their victims, and they would not have been able to kill those whom they saw as equals rather than inferiors.

Lastly, the ordinary men were further distanced from their victims because of the nature of the killings. Browning states that the killings were well organized and broken down into stages, allowing the ordinary men to cast blame and responsibility onto a different group of the battalion. For example, for a majority of the shootings, men other than those of Police Battalion 101 were enlisted to kill the Jews, such as the *Hilfswilligen*, or *Hiwis*, who were volunteer Latvians, Lithuanians and Ukrainians. Moreover, the men who only drove the victims to the execution site felt that they could abstain from accepting any responsibility for the liquidation of entire villages (Browning 162-163). In addition, alcohol was essential to the completion of many of the mass shootings. Without this enabler, the ordinary men would have been all too aware of the gruesome nature of their actions, and would not have been able to carry them out. This conditioning of the men in Reserve Police Battalion 101 allowed them to commit thousands of murders.

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<sup>22</sup> Browning, Christopher R, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland*, New York: HarperPerennial, 1998, 202.



### *Fear and Group Pressure:*

While the conditioning of the ordinary men contributed greatly to their behavior, Browning also recognizes that the effects of a totalitarian state had a substantial impact on the perpetrators' actions. Even though Browning acknowledges that there was no evidence of any perpetrator being punished for disobeying an order to kill, the men still lived in fear of what might happen to them. In one such instance, a man whom Browning refers to as Arthur Rohrbauch was known for not being able, or willing, to kill the Jews. This made him seem less manly within the battalion, and he had been told by a superior to "become tougher." When he was with this superior in the woods and refused to kill some Jews, Rohrbauch stated that he had only "had no trouble" due to the sympathy of Major Wilhelm Trapp (Browning 130). The men did fear punishment for not obeying the orders to kill, and a feeling of distrust emerged within the group. One member of the battalion stated that, "over time one learned how to evaluate one's comrades and if one could risk not shooting captured Jews contrary to standing orders but rather letting them go" (Browning 130). Therefore, though no punishment for disobeying those orders was recorded, the men still felt threatened, and as a result, committed the murders.

Moreover, Browning states that the social isolation that the men faced for not killing Jews was almost unbearable so far from home and in such terrible conditions. When one of the ordinary men refused a killing order, he "risked isolation, rejection, and ostracism – a very uncomfortable prospect within the framework of a tight-knit unit stationed abroad among a hostile population, so that the individual had virtually nowhere else to turn for support and social contact" (Browning 185). The men feared not only consequences from their commanding officers, but also the social ostracism that their comrades would cast on them if they did not comply. This isolation may not seem reason enough to kill an innocent Jew, but Browning

emphasizes time and again that these factors are not to be taken as a sole reason for the men's behavior, but rather as part of a larger, multi-causal explanation of the battalion's actions.

In addition, Browning cites a psychological study to help explain the behavior of the men in Police Battalion 101. He argues that the men were under extraordinary psychological and group pressure that caused them to conform and thus, kill the Jews. To support this claim, he references Stanley Milgram's study, which investigated how humans obey authority. The study found that some degree of obedience was present when an authority figure gave the orders, even despite differing circumstances. In contrast, when no authority figure gave the orders, none of the test subjects obeyed. This is significant, because the test subjects believed they were applying an electric shock to another human being; they were willing to cause harm when an authority figure told them to, but not when an equal or lesser person gave the orders. Browning believes that this same basic human characteristic of obeying authority was present within Police Battalion 101. He does not believe that obeying authority is a particularly German trait, but rather something that all humanity embodies. Moreover, Milgram's study also revealed that peer pressure to conform also resulted in the test subjects inflicting pain on other humans if only to keep a sense of belonging within the group. From this, Browning concludes that "the mutual reinforcement of authority and conformity" also contributed to the behavior of the ordinary men in Poland (Browning 171-175).

#### *Police Battalion 101 as Ordinary Men, Not Ordinary Germans*

Ultimately, Browning comes to the unsettling conclusion that the actions of Police Battalion 101 cannot be explained away easily as some phenomenon particular to German behavior. Indeed, he argues that the factors of his multi-causal explanation are representative of human behavior in general. He states that none of the individual factors that most contributed to

the perpetrator's actions – racism, belief in propaganda, conforming to peer pressure and fear, and obeying authority – are faults present throughout humanity. In arguably the most chilling sentence of *Ordinary Men*, Browning challenges the reader: “If the men of Reserve Police Battalion 101 could become killers under such circumstances, what group of men cannot?” (Browning 189). This is a bold claim to make, although Browning does provide substantial evidence throughout his book that supports it. I believe that it is necessary to compare Browning's argument to the evidence found in Klemperer's diaries, to determine if his multi-causal explanation is correct, or if it is not satisfactory in explaining the actions of ordinary Germans.

### **Browning's Argument Reflected in Klemperer's Diaries**

After comparing the evidence in Victor Klemperer's accounts to the argument posed in *Ordinary Men*, I found that Browning's multi-causal explanation was indeed supported by the diaries. As I illustrated in the first chapter of this study, many different factors influenced the ordinary Germans and caused them to facilitate the Holocaust. Not all were antisemitic, but most were fearful, conformed to societal pressures, or were influenced by the antisemitic propaganda and the isolation of the Jews that resulted from it. This is much like Browning's argument, in that the motivations of ordinary Germans, not just of the ordinary men of Police Battalion 101, were multifaceted in nature. Moreover, evidence in Klemperer's diaries strengthens the individual factors in Browning's argument, and also gives credence to his claim that these factors reflect humanity as a whole, rather than a particular aspect of Germanness.

#### *Indifferent, Not Antisemitic:*

Browning argues that a majority of ordinary Germans were not virulent antisemites, but rather were either indifferent to the persecution of the Jews or supported the Nazis, but for other

reasons. Many instances of this apathy appear in Klemperer's diaries, from statements made by complete strangers, or by those with whom Klemperer was closely acquainted. For example, on February 21, 1933, Klemperer writes about his friend Thiele, who "was against Hitler but for banning the communist party." Here it is clear that some Germans might not have supported the Nazis but shared their enemies. Likewise, on May 10, 1936, Klemperer records a visit to his former maid, Agnes Scholze. She and her family were Wendish Catholics and lived far out in the countryside. There he finds "a large, low room downstairs, pictures of saints, Hindenburg and Hitler (although the Wendish Catholics are not at all Nazi supporters – nevertheless: 'It may not be deliberate intention that so many injustices are taking place,' says Scholze [her husband].)." Again, one of Klemperer's Aryan friends, not disposed to the Nazi cause, neither agrees with the regime, nor believes that the regime is responsible for all of the persecution of the Jews.

Exactly one month later, on June 10, 1936, Klemperer writes of another similar experience: "A couple of days ago Rector Kleinstück (courageous!) sent his son... to me. I found what he had to say about the opinions of his class extremely interesting: 'We are all in the HJ; most of us would dearly like not to be in it... They are 60, 80, 100 percent against the Nazis, only the three stupidest boys, whom no one respects, are entirely for it.'" This young German's quote reveals that even the youth, arguably the most impressionable demographic, did not support the Nazi cause. They were simply required to join organizations like the Hitler Youth, but this compliance does not mean that they were virulent antisemites who blindly followed Hitler's regime. In addition, a few months later on September 5, 1936, Klemperer writes of another reason for the Germans' support of the Nazis. He states, "Interesting to me and characteristic of the petit bourgeoisie was the fear of Russia. They believe Bolshevism – perhaps

rightly – to be the greater evil. They see through the Jew-baiting and do not like it, but they put up with everything out of fear of Russia.” As Browning argues, ordinary Germans voted for the Nazis for several other reasons besides antisemitism, and a large portion no doubt feared a threat from Russia.

Klemperer’s diaries also demonstrate the acts of generosity and solidarity of non-Jews that reveal the lack of a widespread, virulent antisemitism. While Browning acknowledged that he had no sound evidence for such a claim, I believe that the diaries provide one with such examples. On July 19, 1943, Klemperer writes of one such instance: “On Sunday afternoon, as I was coming from the cemetery, an elderly gentleman – white goatee, about seventy, retired senior civil servant – crossed Lothringer Strasse toward me, held out his hand, and said with a certain solemnity: ‘I saw your star and I greet you; I condemn this outlawing of a race, as do many others.’ I: ‘Very kind – but you must not talk to me, it can cost me my life and put you in prison.’ – Yes, but he wanted to say it and had to say it to me.” As Klemperer notes, this man had much to risk, yet he felt compelled to show Klemperer his solidarity. While this might not have been an act of strong resistance against the Nazi regime, it was a small act that helped Klemperer realize that the Germans were not all antisemites.

Many other acts of solidarity are present in the diaries. Klemperer writes on April 12, 1942, of an acquaintance’s encounter with the police in Dresden: “What Kätchen reported about a colleague today at work is both characteristic and consoling. He was held in the Dresden police cells for three weeks, because he had signed a letter without ‘Israel.’ He had an easy time of it. Work together with Aryans, *good warders*, tolerable food. The warder told him not to lose heart, it would not last much longer. On leaving: If they bother you too much, or if you don’t have enough to eat, ‘then just sign your name without Israel again’! You’ll be alright with us!”

On February 18, 1943, Klemperer writes that a non-Jewish woman in a store gives him more food than his ration card permits, while another woman offers to pay for him. When he objects to both acts, the shopkeeper states, “Come back here toward evening, I’ll give you more. During the day – I supply the SA, I have to be careful (...) Then drop by during your time, I’ll make a sign if the coast is clear.” This woman even went so far as to tell Klemperer to come during his shopping hour of three o’clock til four o’clock, despite the fact that the SA shop there as well. A few months later, on June 23, 1943: “Yesterday evening on Worsmer Strasse an older worker – as far as I could discern in the twilight – cycles right up to me from behind and says in a kind, fatherly voice, ‘Things will turn out very differently in the end, won’t they, comrade?... Let’s hope very soon.’”

Most surprising is a comment from the owner of a company, whom Klemperer refers to as Bauer. On December 11, 1943, Klemperer writes that he was supposed to start work at Bauer’s, but instead will be sent elsewhere because of what Bauer states: “ ‘It was a lot of trouble getting you here, because we have enough men, are supposed to hire women. We hit upon the expedient of lending you to the Möbius company...My friend Möbius also belongs to the SS, but you need have no fears because of that, his thoughts on these matters are even more radical than mine. Only I beg you, you must not say that you are well off with us. On the contrary, you must complain about bad treatment; otherwise we will get into trouble, and it will be to your detriment above all.’” This man and his friend, both in such high positions and even visible party members, were clearly not virulent antisemites, but rather actively helped Jews like Klemperer. Thus, the evidence in Klemperer’s diaries supports Browning’s assertion that certainly not all ordinary Germans were virulently antisemitic, nor firm believers in Nazi doctrine.

*Isolation of the Jews Conditioned Ordinary Germans:*

While Browning maintains that a majority of ordinary Germans were indifferent rather than antisemitic, he also acknowledges how effective Nazi propaganda was in influencing them to dehumanize the Jews. This isolation of the Jews through Nazi ideology conditioned the ordinary Germans just as it did the ordinary men of Police Battalion 101. On March 19, 1944, Klemperer describes a comment from the non-Jewish foreman of the factory in which he is forced to work. The man mentions that the war has been caused by billionaires, but Klemperer adds: “Behind the couple of billionaires I heard a ‘couple of Jews’ and felt the belief in Nazi propaganda. This man, who is undoubtedly not a Nazi, most certainly believes that Germany is acting in self-defense, is completely in the right, and that the war was forced upon it; most certainly he believes, at least in large part, in the guilt of ‘world Jewry’ etc., etc. The National Socialists may have miscalculated in their conduct of the war, but certainly not in their propaganda.” As I have described in detail in the first chapter of this study, antisemitic propaganda, combined with Nazi edicts like the Nuremburg Laws, made the Jews outcasts of society. This isolation of the Jews made it ever easier for ordinary Germans to avoid and even persecute those Jews who might have once been their neighbors, co-workers or friends.

Klemperer documents several instances of this isolation and abandonment from his friends. A professor at the Technical University in Dresden, Klemperer lost all of his teaching privileges after Hitler came to power, and he describes the response of his co-workers very simply: “I said: ‘None of my colleagues bothers about me. They think: another one gone – who will be next?’” (May 7, 1935). Beyond the apathy of his co-workers, even more hurtful was the abandonment he and his wife experienced from very close friends. Nearly a year later, on April 24, 1936, he writes that he and Eva have “become ever more lonely, I become ever more

distrustful...Why has there been not a word from Annemarie Köhler for months? Why has Johannes Köhler not phoned, as agreed, to arrange an excursion by car together?" These were dear friends of the Klemperers, and even they were conditioned to leave the Jews in isolation. Months later on September 14, 1936, Klemperer writes of a "terrible abandonment by all friends." Hence, a vast number of Aryans were conditioned to isolate the Jews, even those who should have been most inclined to defend them.

Also present in the diaries are accounts of Nazi antisemitic laws contributing to the Jews abandonment. On February 11, 1937, he states, "I wrote to ask Wengler, from whom I have heard nothing for months, whether he could borrow the critical edition of Heloise (and a number of other things) from the department library. He came here with his sister Sunday afternoon: he did not dare do so, the new Civil Service Law is too strict...people of German blood...and so on. It was brave of him to visit me at all. Thus the sense of being cut off gets worse every day." Just as Browning argues, the laws and propaganda contributed to an extreme isolation of the Jews, which conditioned the ordinary Germans to treat the Jews as less than human, or to simply ignore them. Later, on January 18, 1938, he remarks about a friend again and about the effect of Nazi laws on his confinement: "Very quiet and yet quieter living-for-ourselves. Johannes Köhler did not reply to my greeting (...) shortage of money, which makes every purchase of gasoline distressing, keeps us at home." After being dismissed from his position at the university in 1935, in accordance with the Law to Re-establish a Professional Civil Service, Klemperer and his wife must remain at home for lack of money. Again, the Nazis intended for the laws to isolate the Jews, to make them aliens in their own homeland, and as evidenced by Klemperer's diaries, the laws were extremely effective.



In addition, Klemperer kept a record of the dozens of laws that were passed to isolate the Jews. On June 2, 1942, he lists thirty-one decrees. Some of them are as follows: “1) To be home after eight or nine in the evening. Inspection! 2) Expelled from one’s own house. 3) Ban on radio, ban on telephone. 4) Ban on theaters, cinemas, concerts, museums. 6) Ban on using public transport...11) Ban on going to the barber...15) of bicycles – it is permissible to cycle to work (Sunday outings and visits by bicycle are forbidden)...18) Ban on leaving the city of Dresden, 19) on entering the railway station, 20) on setting foot on the Ministry embankment, in parks, 21) in using Bürgerwiese [street] and the roads bordering the Great Garden...Also, since the day before yesterday, a ban on entering market halls...25) Because of the star all restaurants are closed to us...” These are just a few of the restrictions that isolated the Jews, that made them outcasts of society. The ordinary Germans were most certainly influenced by these edicts; little by little, the Jews were forced to retreat from everyday life, making it easier for the ordinary Germans to think of them as inferior, as people who needed to be ostracized. Hence, Klemperer’s accounts support another factor in Browning’s multi-causal argument.

*Ever-present Fear and Pressure from One’s Peers Influenced the Germans:*

Klemperer’s diaries also support Browning’s assertion that fear under the totalitarian, Nazi rule cannot be discounted and was indeed a contributing factor to the behavior of the ordinary Germans. Throughout the diaries, Klemperer discusses the paralyzing fear that he, his wife and even non-Jewish friends experienced during the Nazi period. One must not forget the effect that fear had on all Germans, whether Jew or Aryan; the Gestapo searched houses, friends informed on neighbors and others were sent away to camps for either being or helping a Jew. This fear did not suddenly appear at the height of the Nazis’ success during the war, but rather it was present soon after Hitler came to power. Klemperer writes as early as March 10, 1933: “On

Monday evening at Frau Schaps with the Gerstles. No one dares say anything anymore, everyone is afraid..." Here Klemperer records not only his fear, but that of everyone, including the Aryan friends with whom he was visiting. A few years later, on June 9, 1936, Klemperer writes of how this fear has become even stronger. When a friend's mother dies, the father faced "instant dismissal if they associate with us" and the Klemperers "could not go to the funeral, that could also have been risky for them." Indeed, it was not just the Jews who were afraid. These friends of Klemperer could certainly not risk losing a job, and they could only imagine what other punishments they would face for helping a Jew. The fear of losing one's position would have been enough, but the fear of the unknown also possessed the ordinary Germans. In this way, Klemperer's isolation from the population becomes even clearer. Those who did not wish to avoid and ignore Klemperer had to in order to keep themselves and their families safe. Then on April 2, 1944, Klemperer describes the fear of Aryans with whom he has been forced to work in a factory in Dresden: "Taken individually ninety-nine percent of the male and female workers are undoubtedly more or less extremely anti-Nazi, well-disposed to the Jews, opposed to the war, weary of tyranny..., but fear of the one percent loyal to the regime, fear of prison, ax, and bullet binds them." Thus, the fear paralyzed the non-Jews, leaving the Jews in complete isolation with no hope for rescue. This connection between the fear that ordinary Germans experienced and Klemperer's isolation further supports Browning's argument; not every factor of his multi-causal explanation was alone sufficient, but rather the factors overlapped and affected one another, resulting in the drastic consequence of ordinary Germans facilitating the Holocaust.

Moreover, Klemperer sheds light on the true feelings of the ordinary Germans. The diaries make clear that fear had a considerable effect on all German citizens. On August 29, 1939, he states, "Who can judge the mood of 80 million people, with the press bound and

everyone afraid of opening their mouth?” Indeed, like Browning argues, it is very likely that a majority of ordinary Germans did not support the persecution of the Jews, but were rather too afraid to defend the victims.

Finally, Klemperer writes about the same pressure to conform that Browning argues motivated the ordinary men of Police Battalion 101 to commit thousands of murders. Though not removed from their homes and forced to live among strangers like the men of the battalion, ordinary Germans who remained in the country still lived in an environment that stifled their decision making and put enormous pressure on them. This constant pressure caused them to fear being even slightly different than the group as a whole. Indeed, on September 14, 1934, Klemperer states that “everything is aimed at deafening the individual in collectivism.” Like the men of Police Battalion 101, the ordinary Germans throughout Germany were enticed not to stray from the mainstream, but to come together to support *das Volk*, of which everyone was part. No one dared speak out against the government for fear that their peers would betray them or that those in authority might discover their nonconformity. Klemperer describes this feeling on February 21, 1935, stating that “Everyone keeps his head down, and the government is firmly in control and celebrates its foreign policy successes.” As Browning argues, the Nazi environment bred conformity, and from what Klemperer witnessed, ordinary Germans could do nothing but avert their eyes from those in power.

In this same vein, Klemperer describes how ordinary Germans felt they needed to conform, or risk ostracism from their peers. On August 24, 1936, he has an exchange with his friend, Ulbricht, a butcher: “I asked him: ‘Are you a National Socialist?’ He, carefully, as he no doubt thought: ‘Under compulsion, yes.’” While it is not clear who has pressured him to join the Party, this man’s careful response demonstrates both the power of one’s peers and the pressure of

authority on an individual. This pressure, coupled with the fear of retribution for not conforming, no doubt caused this man to support the Nazis. Likewise, on December 15, 1938, Klemperer describes an event with another friend that reveals the incredible effect of group pressure:

“A little while ago Constable Radke was here from the local council, I should come up to the council office because of the identity card. We had a friendly conversation, the man shook my hand, told me to keep my spirits up. We know from before that he is certainly no Nazi, that his sister is in difficulties, because her husband, a gardener, has a grandmother who is not Aryan. But then the next day, when I was up there, he happened to come through the room; he stared ahead as he went past as much a stranger as possible. In his behavior the man probably represents 79 million Germans, perhaps half a million more than that rather than less.”

This man, whom Klemperer does not believe is an antisemite, succumbs to the pressure of those around him, and in so doing, contributes to Klemperer’s isolation. What is more, Klemperer is under the assumption that a vast majority of Germans also succumbed to that pressure, thus further contributing to the facilitation of the Holocaust. In addition, other factors, such as fear and isolation of the Jews, combined with this pressure to conform. Browning’s argument hence gains more credence, and is certainly a sound explanation for the ordinary Germans’ facilitation of the Holocaust.

### **Conclusion**

Explaining the perpetrators’ motivations may be the most difficult task for historians studying the Holocaust. The complexity of the Germans’ emotions and beliefs, their varying backgrounds and the totalitarian environment in which they lived all contributed to their behavior. Yet Browning somehow manages to capture the essence of their motivation, and

makes the facilitation of the Final Solution easier to grasp. Though unsettling, the fact that his multi-causal argument could be applied to any group of people does give his explanation credibility. For as chilling as it may be, one must remember that the Germans were human; they were no different in this respect than any other ethnic group. While Browning does acknowledge that certain factors were necessary for the Holocaust to occur, especially the rise of Hitler and the Nazis, the fact that his multi-causal argument could apply to any group of people under the right conditions allows one to learn from the lessons of the atrocities. One cannot easily excuse the killings as some phenomenon of German culture during a specific time in history, something that will not likely happen again. As evidenced by Klemperer's diaries, any man exposed to the same factors of Browning's hypothesis can become a willing killer, or, a willing bystander. Thus, Christopher Browning's *Ordinary Men* reminds one that embracing the complexities of the Holocaust, rather than setting them apart as something inexplicable, can grant one a depth of understanding necessary for preventing another similar atrocity.

### Chapter Three: Goldhagen's *Willing Executioners* in Contrast to Klemperer's Evidence

While Browning's argument received high praise from fellow historians, it was not the only argument that attempted to explain the actions of ordinary Germans. Only four years after Browning's *Ordinary Men* appeared, another work addressing the same issue was published. This time, the work was not by another historian, but by a political scientist trained at Harvard University, Daniel J. Goldhagen. What is more, his best-selling book, *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (1996), was his dissertation that earned him a Ph.D in political science. The book soon garnered both harsh criticism and praise, and an intense debate developed pitting Browning's argument against Goldhagen's monocausal explanation of why ordinary Germans became killers in the Holocaust. Goldhagen's argument is undoubtedly the more controversial of the two. In crafting his argument as to why the Germans committed murderous acts during the Holocaust, Goldhagen investigated the perpetrators in death camps and death marches, and focused on Police Battalion 101, as did Christopher Browning. Both he and Browning agree that these men were not forced to kill Jews, but they come to two strikingly different conclusions about why the Germans chose to participate.

His choice to write about an issue that Browning had already addressed, and to focus again on Police Battalion 101, proves that Goldhagen wished to add more to the argument. Even the title's inclusion of "ordinary Germans" reveals that he intended to address Browning's argument directly.<sup>23</sup> And indeed, his argument is much different than Browning's. While Browning holds that the killers' motivations can be explained by many factors, not unlike those presented in Klemperer's diaries, Goldhagen holds that only one explanation can be considered – that of an "eliminationist" antisemitism throughout Germany. It is this monocausal explanation

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<sup>23</sup> Hilberg, Raul, "The Goldhagen Phenomenon," *Critical Inquiry* 23 (Summer, 1997): 721, [JSTOR](http://www.jstor.org/stable/1344046). The Ohio State University, Columbus, OH. 11 May 2009 <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/1344046>>.

that earned him much criticism from many historians and is the chief investigation of this chapter.

**Goldhagen's Monocausal Argument: Eliminationist Antisemitism as the Motivating Factor for All Ordinary Germans**

Daniel Goldhagen's argument is that a virulent, eliminationist antisemitism pulsed through Germany for centuries and only intensified with Hitler's rise to power in 1933. Furthermore, he posits that this is the only legitimate cause for the perpetrators' willing slaughter of millions of Germans. In stark contrast to the evidence in Browning's *Ordinary Men* and in Klemperer's diaries, Goldhagen does not claim that only the killers were eliminationist antisemites, but also the vast majority of the German population. Though Goldhagen does make some sound points in his dissertation, it is this bold claim that detracts from the rest of the material in *Hitler's Willing Executioners*, and as such, this eliminationist antisemitism must be investigated further.

According to Goldhagen, eliminationist antisemitism is "the belief that Jewish influence, by nature destructive, must be eliminated irrevocably from society" (Goldhagen 48). He maintains that this virulent antisemitism explains why ordinary Germans, who otherwise had no desire to even associate with the Nazis, much less kill Jews at the Nazis' behest, would go to such great lengths to murder countless numbers of Jews throughout Europe. Furthermore, he argues that nearly all Germans were antisemitic, and to such a degree that they advocated extermination as a solution to the "Jewish Problem." (This part of his argument, that antisemitism was present throughout Germany, needs to be investigated further, and I will examine it in more depth later in this study.) By detailing case studies from *Einsatzgruppen*, concentration camps and death marches, Goldhagen outlines his argument as to what motivated these Germans to become facilitators of the Holocaust. He begins this argument by discrediting

five main reasons for the Germans' guilt, reasons that other historians have relied on for years to help explain the phenomenon of the Holocaust. These five reasons are that the Germans could not disobey orders; that German society was committed to following authority, no matter what the cost; that psychological pressure caused the Germans to allow and participate in the persecution of the Jews; that some Germans sought to advance their careers by committing the atrocities; and that Germans were too far removed from the general plan of the Final Solution to realize they were contributing to the mass slaughter of millions of Jews. From there, Goldhagen states that one is left with only one possible explanation for the Germans' involvement in the Holocaust: eliminationist antisemitism.

### **Goldhagen's Reasoning Against Five Conventional Explanations of Ordinary Germans' Participation**

#### *Refusing Orders Would Result in Punishment:*

The first conventional explanation that Goldhagen attacks is that the Germans participated in the Holocaust because they felt that they could not refuse any order, much less an order to kill Jews. This explanation holds that the Germans would be punished for refusing any and all orders, and that Germans feared that refusing an order would result in harsh consequences, even death. Yet Goldhagen maintains that based on a significant amount of evidence, this explanation has no credibility. In regard to executions of those who refused to kill, he states that "records of the SS and police courts show that no one was ever executed or sent to a concentration camp for refusing to kill Jews" (Goldhagen 379). Since no evidence exists of any executions resulting from Germans disobeying orders, Goldhagen asserts that the Germans could not have legitimately feared death as a consequence of their abstention from



murder. Furthermore, he argues that the evidence does not substantiate a German fear of any form of repercussion:

“...there were only fourteen cases in which it was claimed that the punishment for refusing to carry out an execution order (not only of Jews) was either death (nine cases), imprisonment in a concentration camp (four cases), or transfer to a military penal unit (one case). Moreover, not one of these cases has been able to withstand scrutiny” (Goldhagen 379).

For Goldhagen, this is proof that the Germans should not have feared any severe punishment for refusing to kill Jews, and that consequently, they certainly had intent to kill the Jews. But what he overlooks is that fear is by nature irrational, and thus it is not surprising that these men feared, without knowing for certain, that the punishment of death awaited them. Therefore, Goldhagen’s argument is weakened by his downplaying a very real fear.

He goes beyond the lack of recorded punishment to the behavior of *Einsatzgruppen* leaders to further support his theory. Within the killing groups, leaders at times made their men aware that they were free to abstain from killing the Jews. These leaders then allowed their subordinates to make themselves busy with other tasks while the rest of the group slaughtered thousands of Jews. Still other accounts state that “they were even permitted to transfer out of their killing units” (Goldhagen 380), thus completely in control of deciding whether or not to participate in the killings. Again, Goldhagen maintains that the Germans had no reason to believe that their lives or careers would be in danger if they chose to refrain from murdering the Jews, and that the members of the *Einsatzgruppen* must have had a desire to participate in the killings since they did not voluntarily ignore the orders to kill.

*Germans in Particular are Prone to Obeying Orders:*

Another conventional explanation is that people, in particular the Germans, “are strongly if not ineluctably prone to obeying orders, regardless of their content” (Goldhagen 381). This is

somewhat similar to the previous argument, in that it maintains that the Germans could not refuse to kill the Jews. Yet the explanation does not imply that the Germans were afraid of consequences, but rather that they could not think for themselves. In effect, the Nazis brainwashed the Germans in order to force them to carry out the atrocities against the Jews. To dispel this theory, Goldhagen cites different moments in history in which the Germans defied authority. He believes that protests after World War I in Weimar are evidence that the Germans were able to think independently, and what is more, voice their opinions (Goldhagen 382). Had the Germans been so inclined to submit to authority, they would not have publicly protested the Weimar Republic. Thus, he believes that ordinary Germans in the Nazi period also were able to disobey and act out against authority, despite what conventional beliefs may hold.

Goldhagen references not only acts prior to the Nazi period, but also the perpetrators' actions in killing squads. He cites evidence of the battalion members killing even when ordered not to, and leaders of death marches killing Jews after Himmler gave the order to cease all killings. Because these Germans disobeyed orders to stop killing, he concludes that they willingly murdered Jews, and thus, were capable of thinking freely and willfully.<sup>24</sup> In addition, Goldhagen cites the Germans' protest of the euthanasia programs of the Nazi regime as evidence that they could indeed have protested the killings of the Jews (Goldhagen 383). He maintains that because the Germans did not blindly follow the Nazis' stance on euthanasia, they should not have been inclined to follow the Nazis' anti-Semitic policies if they opposed them. Since they remained silent, Goldhagen finds that this is further indication of their acceptance of the persecution, rather than a desire to obey authority at all costs.

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<sup>24</sup> Berman, Russel A., "An Imagined Community: Germany According to Goldhagen," *The German Quarterly* 71 (Winter, 1998): 64, *JSTOR*, The Ohio State University, Columbus, OH, <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/407517>>.

*Psychological Pressure From Peers Caused Germans to Persecute the Jews:*

The third conventional explanation for Germans' persecution of the Jews is that intense psychological pressure forced them to be brutally cruel toward the Jews. This convention maintains that the Germans were so intimidated by what others would think of them if they refrained from harming Jews that they became participants in the persecution and slaughter of an entire race. Goldhagen does admit that instances of psychological pressure caused some Germans, against their will, to harm the Jews. He states that some Germans working in the camps "hit or feigned at hitting Jews when and only when in the presence of other Germans" (Goldhagen 383). Lieutenant Buchmann of Police Battalion 101 even succumbed to the pressure "despite his evident disapproval of the killing" (Goldhagen 383). Still, though Goldhagen does acknowledge the fact that peer pressure did influence the actions of some Germans, he finds that it is only applicable in the cases of individuals and cannot justify the actions of entire killing squads or camp guards during the Nazi period.

Peer pressure would have caused Germans to act in a way so as not to disappoint their fellow Germans and to act in a way that would have made them equals within a group. Goldhagen believes that the views of an entire group, rather than of a few strong personalities, dictate how one will conform under psychological pressure. Because of this belief, Goldhagen holds that if a majority of Germans really had abhorred the persecution of the Jews, then most would have been compelled to refrain from harming the Jews rather than compelled to taunt, beat or kill them. Indeed, he states that if psychological pressure had been a factor, and that the Germans had not been virulent antisemites, then they would have worked "to prevent, not to encourage" the persecution of the Jews (Goldhagen 383-384). As it stands, most Germans who admitted to being pressured ended up participating in the persecution rather than abstaining from

it, and in Goldhagen's mind, this is equivalent to evidence of a widespread, eliminationist antisemitism throughout the populace.

*Germans Persecuted the Jews in Order to Advance Their Careers:*

The fourth convention maintains that Germans were not necessarily virulent antisemites determined to exterminate the Jews, but rather were only highly motivated careerists who would do anything to garner more clout within their profession. In this line of reasoning, the Germans saw the Holocaust as a way to advance and to guarantee future success in their careers. They believed that if they refrained from participating in the persecution of the Jews, then they would be held back from promotions or worse, demoted from their positions. In order to sustain their job security or to advance beyond their fellow associates, the Germans who persecuted the Jews did so in a competitive manner, hoping to win out and be recognized for their achievements.

Goldhagen ardently disagrees with this convention. He maintains that this can only be applied to those Germans who were "in positions of responsibility in institutions that were involved in the making or executing of German policy toward Jews" (Goldhagen 384), and not to Germans who were members of police battalions in the Nazi period. Due to the demographic group from which most of these men were chosen, it was not likely that they aspired to rise up in the ranks of the military; they already had established jobs independent of the police battalions and were likely to still have those positions after their service in the police battalions (Goldhagen 384). To Goldhagen, it seems highly illogical that the men in these police battalions would have sought promotion within the ranks of the military, and instead were proponents of eliminationist antisemitism.

*Disconnect From Other Groups Led to a Poor Understanding of the Persecution:*

The final conventional explanation for why the Germans persecuted the Jews is related to the logistics of the Holocaust. It holds that the Germans were too separated from other operations of the Final Solution to understand what effect their actions were having on the Jews. Those in administrative positions did not know the fate of the Jews whose files they stamped for deportation, the Germans who rounded up Jews from their homes and sent them on trains did not know the passengers' final destination and high ranking Germans did not know what effect the orders they received from above would have on the Jews. For Goldhagen, one cannot reasonably accept this explanation, as it removes any ounce of German credibility or responsibility. While most apply this explanation to the "desk murderers," those who stamped the papers that sent Jews to their deaths in concentration camps, Goldhagen maintains that it is an explanation for neither the actions of the desk murderers nor those who shot and killed Jews throughout Germany and Eastern Europe. Especially for those in police battalions who stood feet from their victims before shooting them, there is no way that they did not comprehend the severity of their actions. Indeed, he claims that there is no evidence that Germans did not understand what was happening to the Jews, and further, that "there is no reason to believe that those who did not would have acted otherwise had they had more knowledge" (Goldhagen 385). Thus, Goldhagen believes that this conventional belief is a poor excuse for the Germans' persecution of the Jews rather than an explanation of it.

*Eliminationist Antisemitism as the Sole Reason for Germans' Persecution of the Jews:*

While discounting all of the aforementioned conventional beliefs, Goldhagen maintains that there is only one plausible explanation for why ordinary Germans persecuted the Jews during the Nazi period: eliminationist antisemitism. He further states that all other investigators

of the Holocaust have not produced any sound explanations for what occurred in Germany. He argues that the men who killed the Jews, the members of the police battalions and *Einsatzgruppen*, concentration camp guards and even the administrative perpetrators were all eliminationist antisemites obsessed with exterminating the Jewish population. A further tenet of Goldhagen's argument is that these ordinary Germans, though only a small portion of the population, represented the feelings of nearly every German citizen. He believes that this eliminationist antisemitism could be found in nearly every German home, stating that the actions of the perpetrators "can, and must be, generalized to *the German people in general*" (402). This monocausal explanation and generalization to all Germans are the most striking aspects of his argument, and also the most problematic.

*Long History of Antisemitism:*

Still, Goldhagen does not believe that the Germans became such virulent antisemites overnight, let alone within the course of the Nazis coming to power. Rather, he believes that there was a long history of antisemitism in Germany, even dating back to the middle ages. Much of this stems from the "Luther to Hitler" theory, that antisemitism, among other constructs, continued from the time of Martin Luther until the Nazis came to power, only intensifying along the way.<sup>25</sup> Based on this long tradition of antisemitism, the Germans during the Nazi period were no different than those who came generations before them; according to Goldhagen, no German could escape the grasp of antisemitism.

In order to illustrate his argument for a long tradition of antisemitism, Goldhagen outlines the progression of antisemitism from the medieval period until the Nazi period. He explains that German Christians in the medieval period hated the Jews because they had, in essence, killed

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<sup>25</sup> Rosenfeld, Gavriel, "The Controversy That Isn't: The Debate Over Daniel J. Goldhagen's Hitler's Willing Executioners in Comparative Perspective," *Contemporary European History* 8 (July, 1999): 255.

Jesus. Antisemitism throughout the rest of German history would stem from these Christians' belief that the Jews were akin to the devil, and should be treated as such (Goldhagen 50-52). He further argues that antisemitism was so extreme during this period that Jews were blamed for any and all tragedies that may have befallen the Germans. He links this to Martin Luther, whose views were "ferocious and influential enough to have earned him a place in the pantheon of antisemites" (Goldhagen 53).

From the medieval period, Goldhagen jumps to the nineteenth century, when antisemitism began to take on racial tones rather than religious. During this period, Goldhagen maintains that the Jews were depicted as a menace to society, a race that was to be feared and thought of as separate from the Germans. He states that "virtually all...in the discussion of the Jews and of the Jews' place in society...agreed that Jewishness and Germanness (however each was defined) were incompatible with each other; more pointedly, Jewishness was...life-threatening to all things German" (Goldhagen 55). Already a hundred years before the Nazis rose to power, Goldhagen believes that the Germans were possessed of a virulent form of antisemitism. By the nineteenth century, the Germans already saw the Jews as distinctly separate from themselves. Furthermore, the Germans already believed that the Jews were a direct threat to the German way of life and that the Jews were somehow morally corrupt. Thus, Goldhagen makes the connection from this nineteenth century antisemitism to the antisemitism of the Nazi period. If the Germans in the 1800s believed that the Jews were a legitimate "life-threatening" menace, then it would only be a matter of time before the Germans decided to eliminate that menace and protect the German race.

With the birth of the Weimar Republic in 1919, Goldhagen states, came an evermore incensed antisemitism in Germany. The antisemitism that had been present for centuries only

grew more obvious and more sustained throughout German society. Goldhagen states that during this time, “virtually every major institution and group in Germany – including schools and universities, the military, bureaucracy, and judiciary, professional associations, the churches, and political parties – was permeated by antisemitism” (Goldhagen 82). He finds that the most telling displays of this phenomenon were present in the schools and highest levels of academia. It is this involvement of academia in the promotion of antisemitic beliefs that Goldhagen believes made it ever easier for the Nazis to be so well received by the general public (Goldhagen 82-83). Moreover, he believes that antisemitism was so widespread in the Weimar era that it was normal and acceptable for antisemitism to be part of every political party’s platform. He argues that this is why other parties only attacked the political aspects of Hitler’s message, and not the virulent antisemitic policy that the Nazis advocated (Goldhagen 84).

From this, then, one might find that if every political party espoused views favorable to antisemites, and that even members of the highest academic circles felt this way, then a vast portion of Germany’s population must also have possessed these feelings of vehement antisemitism. And this is just the conclusion that Goldhagen himself comes to, in fact, must come to, in order for his theory of eliminationist antisemitism to have any credibility. With the advent of the Nazi period, Goldhagen states that a majority of Germans revealed their true feelings toward the Jews. He makes note of *Kristallnacht* in particular to illustrate this. The day after the pogrom, a large rally was held in Nuremberg where Julius Streicher spoke out against the Jews. Over 100,000 Germans came to hear him speak in light of the destruction and abuse delivered against the Jews only the day before. Goldhagen cannot countenance that the Germans were opposed to or disgusted by the plight of the Jews during *Kristallnacht* (November 9-10, 1938), and instead maintains that this is evidence that the Germans favored what had occurred



(Goldhagen 102). Even more indicative of the Germans' antisemitism was their participation in the pogrom itself. Goldhagen describes that since the Jews had been made *vogelfrei*<sup>26</sup> they were now easy prey for the ordinary Germans, as "even youths and children contributed to the attacks, some undoubtedly with their parents' blessings" (Goldhagen 101).

But what of a backlash against this outrageous display of barbarous antisemitism? Goldhagen admits that there were some Germans who found the acts deplorable. He states that Germans expressed "criticism, even sometimes outrage" (Goldhagen 101) at the event, and that they did "express openly and volubly their disenchantment with the wastefulness and naked brutality of the nationwide assault" (Goldhagen 102). Yet while he admits that there were objections to *Kristallnacht*, he then states that "the Germans did not cry out against the enormity of the injustice, which appears not to have moved them" (Goldhagen 102). Here is a clear example of how Goldhagen's argument for a near universal, eliminationist antisemitism is at times weak, especially in his attempt to show that nearly every German harbored these feelings. How could the population both "openly" criticize the pogrom and remain silent against the persecution? I will investigate this discrepancy and others further in this study.

As to be expected from earlier explanations of Goldhagen's argument, he does not find that the Nazis created the eliminationist antisemitism throughout the German population. Rather, Goldhagen maintains that the Nazis strove to intensify antisemitism both socially and legally throughout Germany, causing the always present hatred of Jews to rise to its highest levels. Through antisemitic propaganda and policies like the Nuremberg Laws, Goldhagen believes that the Nazis made the Germans feel comfortable in their antisemitism and caused them to become even more accepting of the inevitable solution stemming from such hatred – extermination of the

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<sup>26</sup> *Vogelfrei*, literally "free as birds," means that one no longer enjoys the protection of the law and as such, is free to be persecuted or even physically harmed.

Jews (Goldhagen 136-137). Since the Nazis did not need to create antisemitism in the populace, Germans must then have been predisposed to antisemitism and it simply remained latent within society until a regime was bold enough to legitimize it. Thus, Goldhagen argues that the Germans were not brainwashed into believing the Nazis' position on the Jews, but had always believed in the racial superiority of Aryans.

From this, he goes on to declare that the only feasible, fundamental explanation for why ordinary Germans facilitated the Holocaust is the eliminationist antisemitism shared by nearly every German. This is the essential component of his argument, as he states that while the other conventional explanations might have an effect on individuals, only eliminationist antisemitism could have caused an entire nation to allow the slaughter of millions of people (Goldhagen 417). He maintains that this phenomenon was both necessary and sufficient for the Holocaust to occur. Had it not been such an integral factor, he believes that the other conventional explanations would not have been strong enough to allow Germans to both kill the Jews and accept the killings, and that the Germans would have prevented the persecution and murder of the Jews (Goldhagen 418). In addition, he believes that this eliminationist antisemitism was the sole reason why the Holocaust occurred in Germany and in no other European state. Antisemitism was present throughout Europe just as it had been in Germany for generations, yet only in Germany did the antisemitism reach such levels as to result in the deaths of six million Jews. He argues that because "no other country's antisemitism was at once so widespread as to have been a cultural axiom...and was so deadly in content" (Goldhagen 419) and the fact that nothing remotely similar to the Holocaust resulted in other European countries is evidence that eliminationist antisemitism caused the ordinary Germans to facilitate the atrocities.

To solidify his argument, Goldhagen explains that there is simply no evidence to the contrary of Germans favoring the extermination of the Jews. He argues that “at no point during the Nazi period did significant portions, or even identifiable minorities, of the German people express either dissent from...or principled disapproval of the eliminationist goals and measures” (Goldhagen 430). This was not a result of the Germans living in fear of the totalitarian Nazi regime, nor a result of pressure to conform, nor a result of the influence of antisemitic propaganda. Instead, Goldhagen maintains that it was a direct consequence of a rife, virulent antisemitism that wanted nothing more than to exterminate the Jews, whether through murder or sterilization. While Goldhagen acknowledges that a majority of Germans did not directly participate in the killings or deportations of the Jews, their inaction still supports his idea that eliminationist antisemitism was the ruling belief among all Germans. He believes that those who willingly attended rallies or visited antisemitic exhibitions proved that they supported Hitler’s plan to kill the Jews. Even those who did nothing, who silently acted out their daily routines and seemingly ignored what was happening around them, were supporters of the extermination of the Jews. Goldhagen staunchly objects that these Germans were simply unmoved by the plight of the Jews. Since so many were likely aware of the persecution of the Jews, through the elimination of civil liberties, to the deportation of Jews to concentration camps, he believes that they had an opinion on such a drastic expression of cruelty and barbarism. Indeed, Goldhagen holds that ordinary Germans’ “silence far more likely indicated tacit approval of measures which we understand to have been criminal, but which ‘indifferent Germans’ obviously did not” (Goldhagen 441). He therefore maintains that the eliminationist antisemitism in Germany, while not the only factor that contributed to the Holocaust, was indeed the only factor that caused the

atrocities to occur, and that allowed the ordinary Germans to facilitate the near destruction of an entire race.

### **Weaknesses in Goldhagen's Argument**

As stated previously, Goldhagen has received harsh criticism from many historians, including Christopher Browning. His critics find fault with various aspects of his argument, but most notably they target his background, style and methodology. I will briefly outline each of these criticisms, and also explain my own criticism. The fact that Goldhagen claims that each ordinary German was a proponent of eliminationist anti-Semitism, yet never cites accounts of Germans other than those in paramilitary groups is what I find most problematic. To dispel his theory of a widespread, eliminationist anti-Semitism, I will again turn to Klemperer. I believe that the accounts of ordinary Germans found in the diaries are evidence that significantly weaken, if not outright contradict, Goldhagen's argument. While other historians have not used the diaries, or accounts like them, to criticize Goldhagen, I believe that Klemperer's records are essential to shedding light on the Goldhagen debate.

#### *Goldhagen's Background:*

Unlike Christopher Browning, Daniel Jonah Goldhagen has received much more scholarly criticism than scholarly praise. What is more, Goldhagen is not a trained historian; when the debate came to the fore, he was a professor of social studies at Harvard, the same institution that granted him a Ph.D. in political science for his work on *Hitler's Willing Executioners*. One might find it odd, then, that he chose to embark on a vast historical investigation of one of the most puzzling questions of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in order to receive a doctorate in political science. Some historians have indeed found this problematic, and have argued that this is due to the influence of Goldhagen's father, Erich Goldhagen. Also a graduate

of and a former professor at Harvard University, Erich Goldhagen had much influence on his son's dissertation, as evidenced by the dedication in *Hitler's Willing Executioners*: "To Erich Goldhagen, my father and teacher." Erich Goldhagen is a concentration camp survivor, and advised his son throughout the production of the dissertation. Some historians find that this influence was detrimental to Goldhagen's work, as it reflected a focus on unsubstantiated beliefs rather than on facts.<sup>27</sup> In addition, other historians have criticized the lack of guidance from Goldhagen's advisors, Stanley Hoffman, Peter Hall and Sidney Verba. The issue that historians take with Goldhagen's doctoral advisors is that despite many inconsistencies in his results, exaggerations of his findings and the presentation of simply nonfactual material, the advisors still accepted his dissertation. For many historians, Goldhagen's advisors did not have enough information on the subject matter, and thus could not identify the discrepancies that a number of historians did.<sup>28</sup> Jacob Neusner even went so far as to say, "Goldhagen seems to have presented his dissertation to the wrong department. But why the department secretary did not send him to the right building no one knows."<sup>29</sup> This lack of guidance contributes significantly to the content of his book, as he did not use historical methodology to analyze his research. Instead, he goes about a historical work from a political science perspective, something with which many historians have taken issue.<sup>30</sup>

In addition, some find that the era in which Goldhagen grew up is another factor contributing to the weaknesses found in *Hitler's Willing Executioners*. Throughout the book, Goldhagen's polarizing language attempts to draw the divide between the ordinary Germans and

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<sup>27</sup> Wolffsohn, Michael, "A People of Willing Jew Murderers?" Ed. Robert R. Shandley, *Unwilling Germans? The Goldhagen Debate*, Trans. Jeremiah Rieme, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998, 78.

<sup>28</sup> Neusner, Jacob, "Hype, Hysteria, and Hate the Hun: The Latest Pseudo-Schoolship from Harvard," Ed. Franklin H. Littell, *Hyping the Holocaust: Scholars Answer Goldhagen*, East Rockaway, NY: Cummings & Hathaway, 1997, 147-52.

<sup>29</sup> Neusner, Jacob, "Hype, Hysteria, and Hate the Hun: The Latest Pseudo-Schoolship from Harvard," 153.

<sup>30</sup> Bauer, Yehuda, "Review: On Perpetrators of the Holocaust and the Public Discourse," *The Jewish Quarterly Review* New Series 87 (Jan.-Apr. 1997): 343-50. [JSTOR](http://www.jstor.org/stable/1455190) The Ohio State University, Columbus, OH. 11 May 2009 <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/1455190>>.

other groups of people, essentially creating a separation between “them” (the Germans) and “us” (everyone else). Erich Geldbach finds that this is due to Goldhagen’s growing up in an American society that supported “simple reductionism” (100). This, unfortunately, detracts from Goldhagen’s argument, and makes it vulnerable to further criticism. Linked to this polarizing phraseology is Goldhagen’s confident and near boastful claim that he and he alone developed the only plausible explanation for why ordinary Germans participated in the Holocaust.<sup>31</sup> In his own words, he states that his findings are entirely “new to the scholarly literature” (Goldhagen 408) and the very title of one of his rebuttal essays, “The Failure of My Critics,” further bolsters an image of a young, egotistical individual. Again, these weaknesses project an image of unprofessionalism and serve to discredit further Goldhagen’s argument.

*Style and Methodology:*

In coming to his conclusions, Goldhagen conducted extensive research into the testimony of many of these ordinary Germans who participated in the Final Solution. Goldhagen’s research focuses primarily on the actions of Police Battalion 101, yet he did not include self-exculpating testimony from its members as it would have compromised his argument that the men were virulent antisemites; the central tenet of his argument is thus already weakened by his narrow examination of evidence. In addition, he does not look to any records of ordinary Germans who were not part of *Einsatzgruppen*, who were not camp guards or were not affiliated in any way with a paramilitary Nazi group. Certainly, one would think that if Goldhagen’s thesis were true, that a majority of Germans possessed this virulent eliminationist antisemitism, evidence of such hatred from other ordinary Germans would only have strengthened his argument. That Goldhagen does not include such evidence does prove problematic. He has also

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<sup>31</sup> Geldbach, Erich, “Goldhagen: Another Kind of Revisionism,” *Hyping the Holocaust: Scholars Answer Goldhagen*, Ed. Franklin H. Littell, East Rockaway, NY: Cummings & Hathaway, 1997, 101.

refrained from examining any sources that detail the accounts of Jews, the victims of the Holocaust.<sup>32</sup> Accounts from Jews certainly could have strengthened Goldhagen's argument that a majority of Germans were ruthless, vicious antisemites, so the fact that he focused only on perpetrators under Nazi command is again detrimental to his thesis.

In addition, Goldhagen's focus on the perpetrators and their disturbing brutality poses another problem. To be sure, one must come to terms with the gruesome nature of the Holocaust in order to understand how and why the Germans treated their victims so inhumanely, but it is certainly not new information to the study of the Final Solution. Since the end of the Nazi period, the carnage, the incomprehensible living conditions, the gruesome slaughter of millions, have all been accepted as facts of the Holocaust. By focusing on the gruesome details of the atrocities, Goldhagen sensationalizes the perpetrators' actions rather than explains them, reducing them to only a pogrom.<sup>33</sup> Beyond that, Goldhagen's evidence of only those most cruel participants of the Holocaust, those who murdered thousands of Jews, makes it difficult to accept his work as thorough and credible. He explicitly refrains from examining any of those involved in the administrative business of the Holocaust, nor does he examine the countless laws and decrees the Germans delivered to reduce the Jews to prisoners in their own homes. Instead, he focuses only on the brutality of the Final Solution, and delivers no new insight into why the Germans facilitated the Holocaust.<sup>34</sup> Thus, I agree with the view of many historians: Goldhagen has only sensationalized the Holocaust, not explained it.

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<sup>32</sup> Bauer, Yehuda, "Review: On Perpetrators of the Holocaust and the Public Discourse," *The Jewish Quarterly Review* New Series 87 (Jan.-Apr. 1997): 344. *JSTOR*, The Ohio State University, Columbus, OH. 11 May 2009 <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/1455190>>.

<sup>33</sup> Berman, Russel A., "An Imagined Community: Germany According to Goldhagen," *The German Quarterly* 71 (Winter, 1998): 66, *JSTOR*, The Ohio State University, Columbus, OH, <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/407517>>.

<sup>34</sup> Hilberg, Raul, *The Goldhagen Phenomenon*, 727.

Furthermore, it is not only Goldhagen's selection of source material that helps to explain the conclusions that he reaches; his background as a political scientist is also crucial to understanding his findings. As a political scientist, Goldhagen did not come to his conclusions in the same manner as a historian would have. This is problematic, as the pronounced historical nature of his work would prescribe a need for sound historical methodology. Instead of this, Goldhagen refrains from extensive comparative research, which is evinced by his failure to investigate other European nations' records of antisemitism and his failure to investigate both victims and perpetrators.<sup>35</sup> Moreover, Goldhagen's advisors at Harvard seem to have been misled in their understanding of what constitutes sound historical research. Despite the thesis being a dissertation in political science, Goldhagen's advisors should have realized the mistakes and contradictions throughout the work.<sup>36</sup> Instead, due to this lack of guidance, Goldhagen's thesis has been subject to harsh criticism from countless historians. Though Goldhagen does make sound and intriguing arguments regarding the Holocaust, the mistakes springing from his background detract from the overall credibility of his work.

### **Evidence from Klemperer**

Again, Klemperer's records present additional evidence that substantially weakens Goldhagen's argument.<sup>37</sup> Throughout the diaries, he struggles with the events unfolding around him, questioning time and again the true feelings of the Germans with whom he has lived for his entire life. Particularly this issue of whether or not the Germans are sympathetic to Hitler's cause, and whether or not they support the persecution of the Jews, is one that Klemperer wrestles with in many of his entries. Yet eventually he comes to say with confidence that the

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<sup>35</sup> Bauer, Yehuda. "Review: On Perpetrators of the Holocaust and the Public Discourse," 349.

<sup>36</sup> Bauer, Yehuda, "Review: On Perpetrators of the Holocaust and the Public Discourse," 349.

<sup>37</sup> In this chapter, I will cite excerpts from Klemperer's diaries by date.



Germans are not willing killers, but rather ordinary men with whom he identifies as his fellow countrymen. I believe this one excerpt from January 10, 1939, is enough to weaken Goldhagen's theory of eliminationist antisemitism:

“Until 1933 and for at least a good century before that, the German Jews were entirely German and nothing else. Proof: the thousands upon thousands of half and quarter, etc. Jews and of Jewish descent, proof that Jews and Germans lived and worked together without friction in all spheres of life. The antisemitism, which was always present, is not at all evidence to the contrary. Because the friction between Jews and Aryans was not half as great as that between Protestants and Catholics, or between employers and employees or between East Prussians for example and southern Bavarians or Rhinelanders and Bavarians. The German Jews were part of the German nation.”

Indeed, this account from someone who lived both before and during the Nazi period significantly undermines Goldhagen's argument. Certainly, this man, a German Jew himself, would have been aware of a virulent, eliminationist hatred targeted at him and his family... unless it did not exist. While he does admit there was antisemitism, he believes that it was not even as strong as regional conflict in Germany. It is clear, then, that Klemperer's account stands in opposition to Goldhagen's thesis. In addition to the above excerpt, Klemperer's references to fear, the effects of Nazism and the kindness of ordinary Germans further detract from Goldhagen's belief that ordinary Germans were virulent antisemites.

#### *Fear in Nazi Germany Contributed to German Silence:*

Goldhagen maintains that because Germans did not protest Jewish persecution, they were all virulent antisemites waiting for the day that the Jewish race might be eliminated.

Interestingly, Goldhagen gives little weight to the fact that Germans during the Nazi period were living under a totalitarian regime policed by brutal Nazi paramilitary groups. While there is little evidence that those in killing squads like Police Battalion 101 were punished for refusing to kill

Jews, there is abundant evidence in Klemperer's diaries that ordinary Germans who did so much as talk to a Jew could have been sent to a concentration camp. Indeed, fear is a major theme throughout a majority of Klemperer's entries.

This fear is not only that of Klemperer, a Jew fearing for his life under Nazi rule, but rather the fear of his Aryan friends. On June 9, 1936, Klemperer states that a friend "faces instant dismissal if they associate with us", and that though his friend's mother has died, "We could not go to the funeral, that also could have been risky for them." Here his non-Jewish friend faces the loss of his job should he associate openly with the Klemperers. Yet the punishment that one could receive for such an offense did not end there. Another non-Jewish friend of Klemperer's, Fraulein Carlo, faced trouble at the hands of the Gestapo: "She said that on the day of the catastrophe [*Kristallnacht*], she had been on the street and involuntarily said Shame! Had been arrested, had explained she had not meant the government, had been released, but was now being watched. She was very intimidated and very resentful" (January 2, 1939). Unlike what Goldhagen argues, the ordinary Germans during the Nazi period did face a real danger should they stand by their Jewish friends. Their silence was not pitilessness (Goldhagen 441), but rather a deep fear of what might have happened to themselves or their families.

The ordinary Germans' fear intensified along with the punishment for associating with Jews. On December 7, 1941, an announcement was made on the radio: "Aryan persons who took Jewish property for safe keeping would receive prison sentences." Were the ordinary Germans supposed to ignore this statement, and go on helping Jews? On April 19, 1942, Klemperer states, "The Aryans' justified fear of associating with Jews! The Gestapo rages against every relationship." Certainly, this fear was real, as evidenced only months later in October 1942. Klemperer writes of a non-Jewish woman and her Jewish husband who have

disappeared: “The Aryan wife may have taken something to her parents for safekeeping, and a house search could have been carried out there. If that is so, then he is a dead man; she perhaps has a chance of surviving a concentration camp...No one knows anything, everyone’s life is in constant danger, the flimsiest thing is good enough as a pretext for being done away with” (October 16, 1942). Klemperer makes it clear that ordinary Germans had a legitimate fear; at the risk of losing their jobs, homes or even their life, they feared any association with Jews. By May 11, 1943, he states that the fear had become even worse: “One no longer reckons on prison or a beating, but straightaway with death for everything and anything.” Thus, ordinary Germans did not necessarily believe in an eliminationist antisemitism; they simply wanted to survive the Third Reich.

*Nazism as a Significant Factor:*

Goldhagen believes that eliminationist antisemitism was always present in Germany, and it was only intensified when the Nazis came to power. This, however, is not supported in Klemperer’s diaries. While it has already been made clear that Klemperer not only doubted that deep-rooted antisemitism had existed for centuries, he also believed that Nazism actually caused ordinary Germans to become antisemitic. On October 18, 1936, Klemperer writes, “The fact is, that the Nazi doctrine is in part not really alien to the people, in part is gradually polluting the healthy section of the population. Neither Christian or Jew is safe from infection.” As supported by previous evidence in this study, Nazi doctrine and propaganda were successful in isolating the Jews, which was essential for antisemitism to be acceptable. Klemperer’s belief that Nazism developed a feeling of antisemitism in ordinary Germans only further detracts from Goldhagen’s argument that the Nazis only released this virulent hatred.

Moreover, the difference in behavior between the Gestapo, SS and SA, and the police whom Klemperer encounters is additional evidence that Nazism was crucial for the persecution of the Jews. In many instances in the diaries, Klemperer records stark differences between how Nazi group members treat the Jews and how ordinary policeman treated the Jews. It is clear that the these members' belief in Nazi ideology greatly affected how they treated them. For example, Klemperer details such an incident on the tram on March 16, 1942: "An SS soldier: 'You have to stand, Jew!' I showed my identification card as a surgeon-major and war veteran. 'I don't care! You stand!' Later a policeman in uniform said to me, 'Take my seat, sir, sit down!'" In addition, home inspections were carried out much more genially by police than they were by Gestapo: "'Your name, sir?' (Sir, where the Gestapo shouts, spits and beats.)... The police are always courteous, always emphatically different from the Gestapo... I could almost believe that the man knows of the frightfulness of the present terror and consciously opposes it" (July 29, 1942). This dichotomy in behavior weakens Goldhagen's argument. If Nazism had little effect on the real beliefs of ordinary Germans, than why such a difference in behavior between the Gestapo and SS, and the police? Here again, Klemperer provides evidence to the contrary of Goldhagen's argument.

*Aryan Acts of Solidarity with the Jews:*

Ultimately, the evidence most detrimental to Goldhagen's argument is that of ordinary Germans helping the Jews throughout the Nazi period. There are countless instances of this solidarity throughout the diaries, some acts small and some posing a direct threat to the lives of ordinary Germans willing to help. The most drastic instances occurred with those proposing to hide Klemperer; he documents at least two instances in his entries. If the ordinary Germans were discovered as helping to hide a Jew, they would assuredly be sent to a concentration camp.

Moreover, there is no way that they could have been eliminationist antisemites. Again, Goldhagen's argument is weakened.

Some acts were not so drastic, but demonstrate the limited presence of eliminationist antisemitism in Germany. One seemingly insignificant comment from Klemperer reveals much in the way of ordinary Germans' attitude toward the Jews. Describing how he and his wife, Eva, are severely limited in what food they are allowed to buy, he states, "We are now literally living off of charity" (June 2, 1942). How could the Klemperers manage to live off of charity if all around them were virulently antisemitic? It is simply not possible. In addition, the most telling evidence of a lack of virulent antisemitism comes at the factory where Klemperer is forced to work. He worked alongside both Jews and Aryans, and he felt extremely comfortable around the Aryans with whom he worked. This is essential, in that not only non-Jewish friends of Klemperer regarded and treated him well, but also those whom he had never known prior to his work at the factory. He states on June 4, 1943, "Again and again I observe the comradely, easygoing, often really warm behavior of the male and female workers toward the Jews; there will always be an informer or traitor somewhere among them. But that does nothing to alter the fact that, as a whole, they are certainly not Jew-haters." His inclusion of the fact that some could be informers only gives his account more credibility; of course not all ordinary Germans were willing to help the Jews, but as evidenced, they were certainly not all antisemites. Therefore, Goldhagen's argument is again shown to be weak: ordinary Germans were not all eliminationist antisemites, and thus, his monocausal explanation cannot be the only plausible reason for the Holocaust.

## Conclusion

This chapter has argued that Daniel Goldhagen's monocausal reasoning is not a valid explanation for why ordinary Germans became killers during the Nazi period. Indeed, though his book did place the focus back onto the perpetrators of the Holocaust, the inconsistencies and fallacies in his argument detract from work's overall worth. Due to his training and background, it is clear that his lack of a comparative and thorough analysis of source material was most crippling to his argument. Moreover, his lack of research into the lives of ordinary Germans whom he condemns as virulent antisemites is the most problematic aspect of his argument. Indeed, if Goldhagen could have made use of Klemperer's diaries in his research for *Hitler's Willing Executioners*, one must doubt that he would have come to the same conclusion.

### **Conclusion: Human, Not German**

From this analysis, I conclude that several factors contributed to ordinary, civilian Germans' facilitation of the Holocaust, and that these motivations were human in nature. The ordinary Germans were not all believers in Hitler, in Nazism or in antisemitism. Rather, they were influenced by a variety of factors, factors that were not alone sufficient, but without which would have made the ordinary Germans less inclined to contribute to the Holocaust. What Klemperer reveals in his diaries is similar to what is reflected in Browning's argument, and further demonstrates that Goldhagen's monocausal explanation cannot be attributed to all Germans during the Nazi period. While antisemitism played a role, I find that there were certainly other factors that contributed to the ordinary Germans' behavior.

What is more, I find that the behavior of these ordinary, civilian Germans is much more human in nature, rather than the German phenomenon to which Goldhagen refers. These ordinary Germans did want to become willing killers, or willing facilitators of the Holocaust. They were human, just like the Jews, just like the others in the world who did nothing to stop the Holocaust. Of course, these Germans made choices, and should be held accountable for them, but to excuse their actions as particularly German does nothing to explain how such an atrocity could take place. Indeed, the behavior and motivations of the ordinary Germans reveals just how easily humans can change from friends to enemies. The Germans were not the only group of humans to have ever persecuted and even slaughtered a group different than themselves. Today, wars of race and hatred and unfortunately, genocide, are still occurring throughout the world. Because of this, it is clear that the multifaceted motivations of the ordinary Germans can be applied to all of humanity. While this is of course unsettling, it is necessary to accept and

understand, so that similar atrocities might be prevented. Thus, from Klemperer's diaries, one does not only gain a better understanding of ordinary Germans, but of ordinary humans as well.



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